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The Formation of a Chinese Feminist
LIN CHUN

Demonizing Political Correctness
TODD GITLIN

The Strange Death of Tory England
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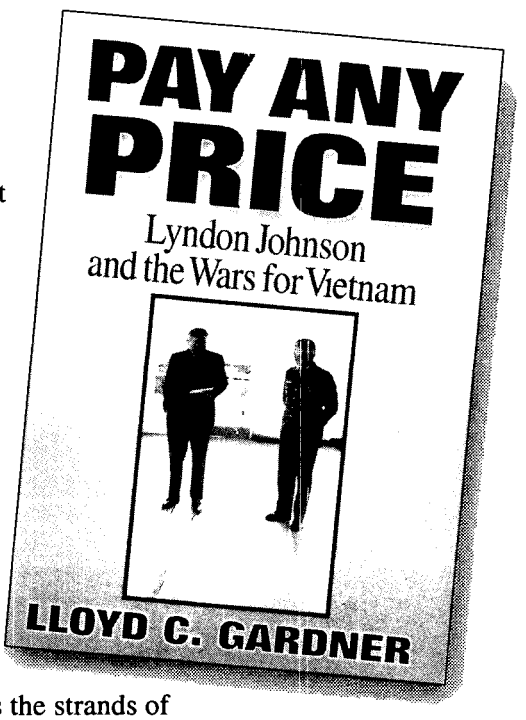

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Editor's Page

I had planned an editorial on Bosnia for this page—a diatribe against the moral blindness and complacency of European governments and the leadership failure of our own, against the cowardice of NATO and the weakness and confusion of the UN, against unfulfilled promises and empty threats, against military actions that were always too little, too late. But a proper diatribe depends on local and timely reference, so I kept postponing the writing. And finally, in the first days of September, the leaders of the West, no doubt for their own political reasons and not for mine, though perhaps driven also by shame or the fear of dishonor, have acted forcefully enough, *maybe*, to open the way for serious negotiations. That much will come of them is still doubtful, for we have no reason to be sure of the stamina or courage of our leaders (or, for that matter, of the readiness for compromise of the Serbs, Bosnians, and Croats). And why did our leaders hesitate for so long—while the killing went on and on, and the number of refugees mounted, and the UN looked and acted like the League of Nations in Ethiopia?

We will continue to print articles on nationalism, "ethnic cleansing," state formation, and military intervention. And we will try in all of them to attend to what so often gets lost in international politics: the interests and concerns of the victims, the men and women at risk.

The debate over affirmative action is our main focus this fall, with short pieces written mostly by editors and writers familiar to our readers—for we are, and the left in general is, divided on this issue, even if the divisions are commonly concealed. My own position is closest to Joanne Barkan's, and I am grateful to her for describing the genuine dilemma that affirmative action poses for people like us. The moral world is not a harmonious place (no more than the political world is) where all good things—all the policies we want to support, all the values we want to affirm—fit neatly together. In this case, especially, the gains we seek when we support affirmative action programs (which, mostly, I think we ought to do) carry real losses with them, and it is crucial to the future of the left that the losses be acknowledged. In an inegalitarian society like ours, efforts to help the most disadvantaged groups with programs like those currently in operation do so largely (not entirely) at the expense of the next most disadvantaged groups. We have to be honest with ourselves about that—and honest also with those "next most" groups, with whom we still seek a political alliance.

We are inaugurating this fall an occasional series called "Reconsiderations," in which we will look back on books important in the intellectual and political history of the left. Yaakov Garb begins with an essay on Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, a book ignored in these pages when it first appeared in 1962, despite the sharp debate that it generated. We were slow to recognize the value of ecological politics—a slowness we shared with most but not all leftists, as Garb makes clear. Acknowledging a similar slowness with regard to feminism, we plan to reconsider Sheila Rowbotham's *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (1973) next.

Lin Chun's memoir is the most powerful piece of writing on China that we have carried in a long time. It is taken from a much longer introduction to a book she is writing on Chinese women and communist politics. Hers is an exemplary journey from revolutionary enthusiasm to a sober, critical, and sustained democratic and egalitarian commitment. I don't know how often that journey has been repeated in the modern world—more often, perhaps, than the contemporary political scene would suggest. —M.W. □

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Mark Levinson

LOOKING BACKWARD: THE REPUBLICAN REVOLUTION

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Working late one night this summer, trying to figure out how to download some information from the Internet, I dozed off at my computer. My head rested on the keyboard, and as I slept I must have pressed a complicated sequence of keys. When I woke, I discovered that I had somehow called up part of a document from the future: an interview with a Dissent *editor from early in the next century. Since that night, I have slept at my computer regularly, but so far I have been unable to duplicate that extraordinary feat. However, I am happy to offer this glimpse into the future, which may provide readers with some hope in these dark political times.*

REPORTER: *What happened to the Republican revolution of the late 1990s?*

DISSENT: First we should clarify what we mean by the Republican revolution. From 1994 to 2000 Republicans made massive cuts in government spending, transferred power from the federal government to the states, and eviscerated the safety net. These were radical changes. But the curious fact is their programs were never that popular.

REPORTER: *How could they have made these fundamental changes if their programs were not popular?*

DISSENT: It was a combination of the collapse of liberalism and a short period of extraordinary political discipline on the part of the Republican party.

REPORTER: *How do you explain the 1994 midterm elections and Newt Gingrich's defeat of Bill Clinton in the 1996 presidential election?*

DISSENT: Republicans took control of the Congress in 1994 for the same reason that Clinton was elected in 1992. People were dissatisfied and they were voting for change. In 1994 Republicans barely won more than 50 percent of the popular vote for Congress. There was not a massive change in consciousness in the mid-1990s toward conservatism.

However, the parties were moving in opposite directions. By the mid-1990s the Republicans had created an ideologically driven local and national organizing network. The Democratic party, which once had a mass base in the unions and in neighborhoods, had atrophied. It had become a collection of conservative politicians, business lobbyists, and social liberals out of touch with the majority of Americans who were struggling to maintain their living standards.

REPORTER: *What about 1996?*

DISSENT: Gingrich and the Republicans were at their peak when liberalism was at its lowest. When Clinton embraced the balanced budget, that was the signal that Democrats, or at least Clinton, had adopted the Republican agenda. In 1995 the debate between the Democrats and Republicans was, "Should we cut over $1 trillion from the U.S. economy over seven years [Republicans]or ten years [Democrats]?" Harry Truman once said that when faced with a choice between fake Republicans and Republicans the voters will choose the real thing. And they did. Clinton's support for the balanced budget was not only bad politics, it was also bad economics.

REPORTER: *Why did he do it?*

DISSENT: Clinton's election strategy, undoubt-

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edly very shrewd, was to attract conservatives by balancing the budget, and appeal to liberals by doing it in a more humane way than the Republicans. However, before Clinton embraced the balanced budget, congressional Democrats had Republicans on the defensive by counterposing their massive spending cuts, which hurt the middle class and the poor, with their generous tax breaks for the wealthy. In fact, House Majority Leader Dick Armey admitted that people would never vote for a balanced budget if they knew what it meant. The day after Clinton announced his plan a spokesman for Gingrich said, "In an extraordinary act of statesmanship, the president took from the hands of Democrats the knife with which they hoped to slit our throats."

REPORTER: *Why was it bad economics?*

DISSENT: The budget deficit was not an economic problem. In 1994 the United States's budget deficit, at less than 3 percent of GDP, was smaller than that of all other G-7 countries (the seven largest economies in the world); and it was growing at a slower rate than the economy, which means that the debt burden was *decreasing*.

In the late 1990s we learned the hard way that a balanced budget doesn't lead to economic growth. In order to balance the budget, $1 trillion of government spending had to be cut by 2002. Except for Social Security, defense, and interest on the national debt, everything the federal government spent money on was cut: from education and student loans to infrastructure and environmental cleanup. The cuts were not small. On average, all non-defense and non-Social Security federal expenditures had to be cut 30 percent. It's ironic and sad. In the mistaken belief that the budget deficit was a burden on future generations, we cut the hell out of programs that guarantee our children a future. These cuts led to a recession, higher unemployment, worse education, and so on. We are still trying to get out from under the real burden imposed on us in the name of preventing a phantom burden.

REPORTER: *It has been very rare in American politics that a party actually implements its platform. Don't the Republicans deserve credit for that?*

DISSENT: They do. But when they implemented their ideas the American people rejected them. The Republican cleverness in the short run was their undoing in the long run. The Contract With America was based on extensive polling. They knew what themes were popular. But none of these abstract themes had anything to do with reality.

REPORTER: *For example?*

DISSENT: Republicans believed that government was the cause of our economic problems. Many of them were quite extreme, as revolutionaries are wont to be. Dick Armey said that Medicare is "a program I would have no part of in a free world." But the American people have a much more complicated attitude toward government. They don't like government in general but they like the specifics of what government provides. If you ask Americans, "Should government play a role in the economy?" or, "Should government spend more money?" the answer will be no. If, however, you ask, "Should government strengthen our Social Security system?" or, "Should government build that road or that school?" the answer is overwhelmingly yes.

REPORTER: *As astonishing as the Republican revolution was, the reaction* against *it was also surprising.*

DISSENT: During the 1997 recession the anti-government ideology came back to haunt Republicans. Unemployment increased from 5.6 percent to over 12 percent. The number of people living in poverty swelled to an all-time high of 44 million.* Conditions were terrible. The Republicans had converted school lunches, food stamps, AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children), and Medicaid into different block grants that provided states with fixed amounts of money regardless of economic conditions. They also cut back the unemployment insurance program. Before the Republican revolution, these programs automatically expanded during recessions when the need for them increased. For example, during the recession in the early 1990s the number of people receiving food stamps rose by five million people. These programs acted as automatic stabilizers, offsetting some of the

*Prior to that the largest number of people below the poverty line was 39.4 million in 1959.

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reduction in the purchasing power of the private sector and cushioning the economy's slide. But in 1997 the opposite happened. *Spending on these programs actually went down when the need was growing. For the first time in seventy years this country had a recession that government policy made worse.* This was a predictable consequence of transferring these programs to the states. Most states are required by law to balance their budgets. As the economy slowed, state tax revenues declined. Some states tried to raise taxes to meet increased demands for services, but even in those states large cuts were required to balance budgets. These reductions made the recession worse. The safety net had been shredded and the government was no longer a countercyclical force cushioning the economy's fall. When people looked to the government to do something, the government wasn't there.

The biggest problems were in health care. Hospitals were forced to close, most people had to pay more for health care, and the number of uninsured rose dramatically. The Medicaid block grant forced states to make very difficult choices. Some states decided to terminate Medicaid coverage for children in families not receiving cash assistance—that is, children in working poor families. Some cut back on care for the elderly, disabled, or blind, and others just reduced coverage for the poor. Predictably, infant mortality also increased.

Gingrich's star faded quickly. I believe that Barney Frank's judgment of Gingrich—that he was one of the least substantive legislators of his generation—will stand. He was a vicious politician, what Frank called a "mechanic of power," and that contributed to his "success."

Reporter: *Republicans used to argue that block grants were necessary because it is more efficient to move programs to the state or local level.*

Dissent: There was much dishonesty in the Republican arguments for block grants. Virtually all the programs that were converted to block grants were already administered at the state and local level. The federal government did not directly administer food stamps, child care, welfare, or foster care. State and local agencies did that. You didn't have to have block grants to give states more flexibility. All you had to do was rewrite the rules.

Reporter: *Many governors actually supported block grants.*

Dissent: That's right. It was a colossal political misjudgment. Even before the 1997 recession many of them realized they had gotten themselves into a lot of trouble. In a very short amount of time the states had responsibility for everything from welfare, Medicaid, transportation, and environmental protection to health and safety programs. It was the most radical transfer of power from one level of government to another since the New Deal. Of course the states had less money to run these programs because we were cutting $1 trillion in government spending. In addition, most states were not equipped to administer these programs. There was very little accountability and states enacted a hodgepodge of regulations. The problems were awesome.

To make matters worse, the Republicans replaced the federal income tax and corporate income tax in favor of a flat tax. Not only did this increase taxes on middle- and low-income families while giving the rich a huge tax cut, it also threw state tax systems into disarray. The repeal of the federal income tax meant the repeal of state income taxes. No state had the capacity to administer its own income tax. The states had relied on the federal income tax to begin state tax computations. So when government transferred responsibility to the states it simultaneously limited the states' ability to raise revenue.

Reporter: *What were some of the problems with specific programs?*

Dissent: Take, for example, welfare. The Republicans took a basic cash assistance program for single-parent families with children, combined it with child care and child nutrition and converted it into a block grant—which of course reduced the amount previously spent. That amount did not rise when poverty increased.

In addition to that, they required states to enroll 50 percent of all welfare parents—about three times the 1994 requirement—in work programs, but provided no funding for the additional work slots. They also said that a state could count toward the 50 percent requirement both people

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placed in work activity and people eliminated from the program. So states eliminated some categories of families in order to both stretch the dollars under the block grant and meet the 50 percent requirement.

When states attempted to move more welfare mothers into work, they had to provide more child care. Previously, the federal government shared the additional child care costs. But the Republicans cut the federal government's contribution even while more mothers were being required to work. So states had to pay for the extra child care, or, when the states couldn't pay, they forced more families off the rolls in order to meet the 50 percent requirement.

REPORTER: *Other examples?*

DISSENT: One of the worst things they did was to change the WIC program, which had the most outstanding record of any federal program. It provided nutrition supplements to pregnant women, infants, and young children, and had been found to reduce infant mortality, low birthweight, and Medicaid costs. They converted this program to block grants and repealed the requirement that states use competitive bidding to purchase infant formula.

Before competitive bidding began in the late 1980s, the WIC program had to pay very high prices for infant formula. Competitive bidding was fought by the two largest infant formula companies, Ross Laboratories and Mead Johnson. By 1994 competitive bidding saved more than $1 billion a year, which was plowed back into the program so an additional 1.5 million low-income pregnant women, infants and children—nearly one of every four served—could qualify. Without competitive bidding there would have been more low-birthweight babies, more childhood anemia, and probably more infant mortality. Despite that, they repealed the competitive bidding requirement.

REPORTER: *Why?*

DISSENT: Because of the belief, common at the time, that states always knew better. This is ironic because the reason Congress enacted the competitive bidding requirement in 1989 was that only half the states had implemented it. The other half had bowed to pressures from the infant formula companies. The Congress, on a bipartisan basis, supported competitive bidding because not to do so was a waste of taxpayers' money.

REPORTER: *How do you explain what happened to the Democratic party?*

DISSENT: One by-product of the Republican revolution was that millions of people realized that politics mattered. During the 1997 recession long-simmering tensions within the Democratic party boiled over. It started when the new insurgent leaders of the AFL-CIO

To Our Contributors

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THE EDITORS □

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launched the Democracy 2000 project. The basis of Democracy 2000 was that the thirty-year decline in wages and living standards for most Americans was not inevitable. The program—increased public investment, paid for by progressive taxation and the elimination of unnecessary subsidies and tax breaks; the empowerment of workers and their unions through labor law reform; enhancement of family economic security through universal health care, pension portability, and higher minimum wages; and a trade policy that supported workers' rights throughout the globe—generated a lot of excitement. Candidates signed on to it, and unions and community organizations ran grassroots campaigns of support. In a way, it was modeled on the Contract With America, but it had much more popular support than the Contract.

The fiscally conservative, pro-business Democrats began to feel isolated amid the growing populist sentiment. This group formed the Democratic Leadership party (DLP). They felt that both the Republicans and Democrats were too extreme. The DLP seemed to have everything: media attention, money, support from well-endowed foundations and think tanks. The only thing it lacked was support from voters. The party soon fizzled and most of its members drifted into the Republican party.

Now that the Democrats have control of Congress and the presidency, their challenge will be to . . . (here the manuscript breaks off) □

Philip Kasinitz

ASSAULT ON CITY UNIVERSITY

Public higher education is under attack, and nowhere is this more evident than at the City University of New York. Many of CUNY's 213,000 students are poor. Most are minority and more than a few are on public assistance. The faculty is largely liberal and far more used to looking to government than to the private sector and the alumni for support. In the Gingrich-Pataki-Giuliani era, this leaves the university without many friends.

Few institutions have as distinguished a place in American intellectual history as the colleges of the City University. None have been as closely associated with traditions of working-class upward mobility. CUNY colleges have produced twelve Nobel laureates and more CEOs than any other university in America, and in their mid-twentieth-century glory days they were central to the intellectual milieu that produced, among other things, this magazine. Perhaps no university in this country plays so important a role for a major city, economically, but also symbolically. Although alumni involvement in university affairs is low, a huge number of New Yorkers take the real and imagined changes in the university personally. The lukewarm support middle-class New Yorkers now give CUNY in the face of assaults by tax-cutting Republicans reflects disillusion, and also some misunderstandings, about what the university has become.

Never a plush institution, CUNY survived on lean budgets for nearly a decade before newly elected Governor George Pataki called for a cut of $158 million this year. Coming on top of a cut in the city's CUNY contribution (both the state and the city contribute to CUNY's budget, with most of the city share going to the community colleges) this cut of nearly 28 percent would have been a disastrous blow to campuses already beset with reduced library budgets, decaying physical facilities, and increasing class sizes. As of this writing (June 1995) it appears that student and faculty opposition has managed to substantially reduce the size of these cuts. However,

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students will still face a $750 annual tuition increase, and some faculty will be laid off. Fewer classes will be offered, and the remaining faculty will teach more.

Although these cuts are primarily the result of the Republican commitment to cut taxes at all costs, both Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Governor Pataki have argued that austerity will actually be *good* for the troubled university. Both minimized the significance of the tuition increase, telling reporters that students could always get part-time jobs and that a little struggle is good for young people. As almost all CUNY students already work, and about one-third work full time, some while supporting families, this seems either ignorant or cruel. With transparent accounting tricks, CUNY faculty were accused of "only working twelve hours a week" ("*I* work twelve hours *a day,*" Giuliani sniped). Journalists repeated the notion that CUNY professors are underworked, focusing on the number of professors who are "released" from some teaching responsibilities without mentioning that the theoretical seven course annual teaching load from which they are being partially released is far heavier than is typical at American Universities. (Not to mention that "release" is usually for administrative duties or for scholarly research.)

Where does this hostility come from? For many New Yorkers, including many CUNY alumni, today's students suffer from comparison to the largely Jewish students of the days before "open admissions."* The comparison is unfair, but given CUNY's history, it is also inevitable. Of course, today's tuition paying students often face far more difficult circumstances than their predecessors did—how many students in 1940 worked full time or had children? Nor are the conditions that created the "glory days" anything we would want to bring back. The CUNY colleges of that era benefited from a great deal of "captive talent": highly qualified Jewish students barred from most of the nation's elite colleges by anti-Semitic quotas. That this is no longer true should be a cause for celebration, not complaint.

Yet however talented and admirable on their own terms, today's CUNY students are, in the minds of a large part of the public, the unworthy successors of a golden age. And CUNY must also bear some responsibility for its own poor public image. Having taught at a hyper-publicity-conscious elite private college (Williams) before taking my current job at Hunter, I am continually struck by how little CUNY works at its public image and by its lack of outreach to its distinguished alumni. In some cases, such as the shameful accommodations made to the ludicrous Leonard Jeffries, it seems to have gone out of its way to alienate them.

Against this background, two recent publications laid the groundwork for the current attack on CUNY. Heather MacDonald, in a major article in the Manhattan Institute's *City Journal* ("Downward Mobility: The Failure of Open Admission at City University," Summer 1994), attacked "open admissions," which she claims has flooded CUNY with ill-prepared students, most of whom would be better off in some sort of vocational training. Numbed by these students' lack of preparation, she argues, the faculty have become either condescending cheerleaders aiming only to boost students' "self-esteem," or time-servers so overcome by students' poor writing that they rely on multiple-choice exams (MacDonald's evidence for the last point, which does not square with my experience, comes from a handful of interviews, not from any systematic study of CUNY teaching).

MacDonald cites CUNY's low graduation rates as evidence for the University's decline. Although these rates are a cause for concern, they also call into question her depiction of plummeting standards; if the standards for a CUNY degree were not considerably more rigorous than the standards for admission, many more students would finish! Indeed, higher graduation rates could be easily achieved by simply giving college credit for remedial work, a politically easy response that, for the most part, CUNY has resisted.

MacDonald also fails to acknowledge that, for all of the university's problems, many CUNY students continue to get a first-rate education. Remediation hardly dominates college life; at Hunter, for example, remedial work accounts for only 6 percent of seats in undergraduate classes.

*CUNY consists of a Graduate Center, ten senior colleges (four-year institutions granting bachelor's degrees), six community colleges, a technical college, a law school, a medical school, and an affiliated school of medicine.

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My own courses are largely the same as those I taught at Williams. Not surprisingly, most Hunter students write less well than their peers at Williams, but there are plenty of exceptions. Their class discussions tend to be better. Further, despite considerable obstacles, many Hunter students strive for the transformative experience college is supposed to be. Somehow between their jobs and their classes they find the time to form clubs, play on teams, debate politics, and generally act like students. The week I read MacDonald's article I made a quick survey of the posters advertising student activities in the large hallway that functions as Hunter's main "quad." That week's events included a talk by ex-Solidarity leader Jacek Kuron (sponsored by the Polish Club), a "teach-in" on Haiti, a Hillel Society-sponsored discussion of ritual in Jewish life, one theater group presenting a talk by Jonathan Kalb, and another performing *The Taming of the Shrew*. It may not be alcove "one" versus alcove "two" at the CCNY of hallowed memory, but it is also not MacDonald's picture of intellectual stagnation.

One gets some sense of this vitality from James Traub's widely discussed *City on a Hill: Testing the American Dream at City College,* published last year. Traub's sensitive portrait of City's faculty and students is far more sympathetic than MacDonald's, or than is generally seen in the press. Many of the students come across as dedicated and hard working, and the faculty are presented as deeply caring if at times too willing to deceive themselves about their students' abilities. He also acknowledges that City has moments of excellence: in a few fine departments and upper-level seminars students get an education equal to that at the best American colleges. Yet on the whole Traub comes to the same conclusion as MacDonald. He is sadly skeptical about the ability of most CCNY students to ever function at a college level.

Although the story Traub tells is basically true in all of its parts, it comes together in a way that is oddly distorted and out of proportion. He devotes a full third of the book to the remedial programs and a long chapter to the struggle over the minuscule, if symbolically important, department of black studies. Yet while he notes that the "relentless strivers" of the highly regarded engineering program "resembled, more than any other group at City College, the students of City's golden age," he affords them only fifteen pages. Even there he depicts the engineers as a marginal exception despite the fact that engineering typically accounts for three hundred to four hundred of City's twelve hundred annual graduates. Similarly Traub frequently points to self-motivated enclaves of immigrant students as islands of excellence within a unprepared sea of native New Yorkers. Yet immigrants—not the *children of immigrants* as in times past, but *immigrants themselves*—now account for almost half of all CUNY students. Traub's pessimism is thus rooted in his strange notion of who is on the margin and what constitutes the core. Indeed, preoccupied by comparisons to the 1940s, both he and MacDonald miss how much immigration has changed CUNY since the late 1970s.

Today, with the fiscal gun to its head, CUNY is attempting to reinvent itself, and the work of these critics is taken seriously by those who will reshape the university. Some of the proposals they have inspired make sense. The lion's share of remediation, for example, is likely to be shifted to the community colleges, where it probably always belonged. Indeed, if the current budget crisis forces CUNY to take a hard look at how to do remediation more effectively, today's dark clouds will have had a considerable silver lining. Yet as author and remedial writing teacher Greg Donaldson recently noted, "criticism of City University remediation contains no such plans for improvement, only the familiar demand for higher standards."

The senior colleges *should* aspire to high standards, not because a leaner CUNY can help finance tax cuts, but because today's students, like those who went before, deserve a shot at a real college education. The broad cultural literacy, intellectual flexibility and critical thinking skills that a liberal arts education is supposed to impart are needed now more than ever. Many CUNY students (most of those I see) can now function in a rigorous college environment. With more ESL (English as a Second Language) programs and more effective remediation, others could as well. The taxpayers should provide them with this opportunity for selfish reasons. New York needs the talents and energy of today's

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CUNY students. If we are very lucky CUNY will produce the next generation's Alfred Kazin or Irving Howe. Perhaps not. But in the next decade CUNY will certainly produce thousands of teachers and nurses, hundreds of accountants and executives, dozens of doctors and lawyers, and probably a future mayor or two. We need these people to have as good an educational grounding as they can possibly get.

Unfortunately, cutting budgets accomplishes none of this. The fact remains that in higher education raising standards usually involves spending *more* money, as New York University's meteoric rise demonstrates. Although accompanied by demands for faculty to "work harder" and for students to "produce," austerity measures will almost certainly hasten the slide into mediocrity. Larger classes and heavier teaching loads mean fewer seminars, less student-faculty contact, less student writing, and more multiple-choice tests. In short, it means cutting the very things CUNY did well during the "glory days" and that the best colleges do today.

As Michael Lind notes in *The Next American Nation*, this country faces a growing social gulf not only between those who go to college and those who do not, but also between those who go to elite private institutions and those who attend underfunded public ones. The assault on public higher education is widening this gulf. For a public unwilling to face the implications of this, it is easy to blame the students. They are told that they are poor substitutes for those who have gone before, that their inadequate high school educations are somehow their fault, and that a little more struggle will be good for them. □

Murray Hausknecht

INSTITUTIONALIZING MEANNESS

Before 1982, if your Social Security benefit came to, say, $419.43 you would receive a monthly check of $419.50. If you began collecting Social Security in 1982, however, and were entitled to the same benefit, your monthly check would be automatically rounded down to $419.00. The change is emblematic of the meanness of the Reagan-Bush administrations, now mutating into a more virulent form.

To be "mean," a dictionary tells us, is to be "1a: selfish in a petty way, unkind b: cruel...2: ignoble, base...3: miserly, stingy"—all perfectly exemplified by the changes in Social Security procedures. Its semantic resonance can be sensed by considering an antonym, "generous": "1: liberal in giving or sharing 2: magnanimity." A lack of generosity is an unwillingness to share with others, and this absence partly explains why meanness is considered ignoble.

These are value-laden definitions; we respect those who are magnanimous and disapprove of the stingy and selfish. Now, however, there is a cultural shift under way, heralded by Newt Gingrich as the "transforming of society from a welfare state to an opportunity society." It is becoming increasingly permissible to express an open contempt for the poor: in the House of Representatives welfare recipients were likened to captive animals reluctant to leave their pens and forage for themselves. Politicians expect and receive approval for proposing severe cuts in welfare programs: New York City's mayor, Rudolph Giuliani, supported by the governor, proposes the elimination of Home Relief, a state program dating back to 1931 that provides help to needy adults who do not qualify for federal aid. There is an unmistakable erosion of magnanimity: Californians overwhelmingly approved Proposition 187, which denies educational and medi-

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cal benefits to illegal immigrants.

A combination of class and race shapes the way welfare reform is discussed. One popular proposal is the tightening of eligibility requirements with the hope, voiced by Giuliani in New York, that it will, as a "natural consequence," motivate poor people to leave the state. The implicit promise is that those who leave will be black. Other popular ideas, ones that cross political party lines, are to limit the time one can benefit from Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and capping benefits to mothers who have more children. Connecticut's governor proposes a twenty-one-month limit on welfare payments in the announced belief that it will stop poor people from moving to his state. A social worker in San Diego talks of "so much passivity in the welfare system." A New Jersey legislator defending a cap on benefits talks of parental "irresponsibility," while throughout the country everyone, from politicians to editors, talks of welfare as a "culture of dependency." In another era the language would have been "lazy, shiftless, and over sexed." Today's language is more civil —a not inconsiderable gain in a society where civility is too often problematic—but it taps into a traditional pool of meanness fed by racism.

"Dependency," "lack of responsibility," "passivity" are also part of another descriptive vocabulary. Failure in American society is always the fault of the individual, a lack of a strong moral character. From this perspective the welfare state is an evil; it not only supports the undeserving poor but, worse, it does nothing to help build their characters. Thus, proposals restricting access to welfare, capping payments, and reducing the length of time one can remain on the rolls are not motivated by selfishness; these reforms are, rather, "tough love." What some mistake for meanness is, in reality, akin to the loving kindness of parents who, concerned with developing the moral character of their children, subject them to a strict and sometimes harsh discipline. Here, again, the racist stereotype of blacks as incapable of self-mastery and childlike in their responses to the world covertly suggests and supports meanness.

But this is meanness with a difference, and a handy piece of jargon helps specify the difference: today we are witnessing the institutionalization of meanness.

Rules and their expectations of behavior are institutionalized when they are accepted as "natural": this is the way the world works; an unproblematic and unquestioned order of things. Institutionalizing meanness points to a fundamentally new way of thinking about and dealing with the inherent vicissitudes of a "free market" economy. To institutionalize meanness is to find nothing problematic or questionable in an ungenerous reaction to need and its threats to human dignity.

A perfect example of how meanness is institutionalized in the course of "welfare reform" is a new Connecticut law that mandates electronic fingerprinting of all welfare recipients. With this requirement Ronald Reagan's urban folklore story, "The Tale of the Welfare Queen," is formally enshrined in the legal code as the presupposition that welfare clients are predisposed to fraudulent behavior. The law proclaims, in effect, that we cannot expect persons on welfare to be law-abiding citizens; they belong to a hostile world, and a line must be drawn between their world and ours.

In a class society, of course, there are always lines between the poor and the others. But institutionalized meanness draws stronger lines and increases the social distance between the two worlds. Generosity means sharing, and that implies a relationship between people who have enough in common to make sharing a sensible act—one does not share with one's enemies. Sharing is a result of a common bond, and the welfare state, to the extent that it rests on the value of generosity, confirms that common bond. But institutionalized meanness endorses as "natural" the idea that the poor are radically different from the rest of us and that we must protect ourselves from them.

This is the specter that haunts the project of "transforming the welfare state." Its success, still far from complete, will be double-edged. It will condemn the poor to a world apart, almost totally defenseless against the indignities of a "free market economy." But at the same time the denial of generosity—a traditional value—will make the whole of our society crueler and more ignoble. □

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John Gray

THE STRANGE DEATH OF TORY ENGLAND

The self-destruction of British conservatism by New Right ideology and policies illustrates a central neoliberal (that is, Thatcherite) theme—the importance of unintended consequences in social, economic, and political life. In sweeping away the postwar settlement that all major parties endorsed for a generation, Thatcherism demolished the social and economic base on which conservatism in Britain stood and created the conditions for a prolonged period of Labor hegemony. Neoliberal Conservative policy in Britain has damaged the ethos of institutions such as the Civil Service and the National Health Service by remodeling them on contractualist and managerialist lines. In addition to squandering a large part of Britain's heritage of civilized institutions, this project of refashioning social life on a primitive model of market exchange has speeded the delegitimation of the monarchy and the Church of England. Further, by stripping democratic local government in Britain of most of its powers and building up the unaccountable institutions of the Quango state—the apparatus of "quasi-governmental" committees appointed by central government to oversee the operation of the newly marketized public services—the Conservatives have marginalized their own local party organizations and thereby contributed to the steep and swift decline of the Conservative party itself. Indeed, the catastrophic performance of the Conservatives in the local council elections of May 1995, in which they suffered their worst electoral rout since the start of the century, suggests that the neoliberal project of permanent institutional revolution may well count its political vehicle, the Conservative party, among its casualties. Even if, in the normal fortunes of political life in Britain, the Conservative party is somehow able to renew itself, it will be in a form that cannot currently be foreseen. As for Tory England—that rich network of interlocking interests, social deferences, and inherited institutions that Tory statecraft has successfully protected for over a century and a half by its skillful adaptation to democratic institutions in Britain—it is now as good as dead.

The self-undermining effect of neoliberal policy in Britain has been even more cruelly ironic than this brief narrative reveals. Margaret Thatcher's principal insight was to perceive that there was, in Britain in 1979, an economic constituency for union-bashing, budget-cutting, low-tax policies—a constituency whose very existence was denied by the patrician Tory "wets," but which she made electorally decisive from the early eighties onwards. The irony is that it is this group that—aside from the various constituencies of the poor that it has become fashionable to lump together under the American category of the underclass—has lost most in the nineties. The deregulated labor markets engineered by Thatcherism in the eighties undermined in the nineties the job security of the upwardly mobile social group—Essex man and woman—which contained Thatcherism's most electorally significant beneficiaries. The deregulation of financial institutions that in the late eighties flooded the economy with easy money and caused asset values to float to unsustainable heights at the same time spawned new financial instruments—personal pensions and endowment mortgages—that spelled loss or ruin for millions of households. (During the first five years of the nineties more

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than three hundred thousand homes have been repossessed—an eviction on a scale that is unparalleled in Britain since the highland enclosures of the 1740s.) The very economic constituency that gained most from early Thatcherism has been most savaged by its longer-term effects. At the same time, the Quango state built up in the wake of the Thatcherite attack on democratic local government and the Majorite policy of marketizing public services has facilitated the growth of a new class of Tory nomenklaturists, managing vast resources without any democratic accountability. In one of its crowning ironies, the neoliberal project in Britain, which began as a response to failing corporatist institutions, has given rise to new economic institutions, which may be termed the institutions of *market corporatism*. These institutions are not only themselves democratically unaccountable; they cannot for long be politically legitimated through democratic institutions. The neoliberal corporate state, in Britain as in any other democratic country, is inherently politically unstable.

Neoliberalism in Britain, for these and many other reasons, has proved a self-limiting project. Yet, contrary to those on the left—by far the majority—who saw it as a blip on the screen of history, it has transformed irreversibly the social and institutional landscape of Britain. If it has signally failed to secure the legitimacy of unfettered market institutions in Britain, it nevertheless has one achievement, unintended and doubtless still uncomprehended by its authors, to its credit: the destruction of Tory England. In the longer perspective of history this role as a brutal and unconscious agent of modernization—including the modernization, and so the return to electability, of the Labor party—may prove to be Thatcherism's sole historic justification. The cost of this modernization, however, has been not only the near-destruction of much of Britain's institutional inheritance, but also the obliteration of that humane postwar liberal conservatism—embodied in such figures as Butler, Boyle, Macleod, and Macmillan—in which Tory paternalist and communitarian traditions were adapted to the conditions of a late modern industrial society.

The dissolution of the postwar settlement was under way well before Thatcher's coming to power in 1979.[1] Unlike corporatist institutions in Germany and Austria, which acted as pacemakers for wealth creation and guarantors of social peace, British corporatism in the sixties and seventies had produced economic stagnation, industrial and social conflict, and a fiscal crisis of the state that triggered the intervention of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The key neoliberal policy framework of fiscal conservatism and its consequence, the retreat from full employment, were accordingly in place in Britain when Margaret Thatcher came to power. The neoliberal project—the project of reining back the state, extending the scope of market institutions, and securing for unfettered markets an unchallengeable legitimacy in the public culture—was adopted by the Conservatives during the years between Thatcher's succession to the leadership of the party in 1975 and the Conservative victory in 1979, the same years in which fiscal conservatism was imposed by the IMF on the Callaghan Labor government (1974-1979). It is worth recalling that the earlier Conservative government of Edward Heath (1970-1974) had come to power with something akin to a neoliberal agenda, and that it had come to nothing. The Heath government was elected on a program of reversing the postwar trend to over-extended government in Britain but it had abandoned this program long before it suffered electoral defeat in February 1974 as a result of its confrontation with the miners. It was, however, the defeat of the Heath government by the miners that most shaped the early stages of Thatcherite policy.

The first phase of the neoliberal project in the early eighties was not an attack on the welfare state, nor the marketization of major social institutions, but instead the abandonment of full employment as a policy objective and the development of a stable framework of public finance—both policies that diminished the power of organized labor in Britain, and both of them expressing the anticorporatist orientation of early Thatcherism. Thatcherite policy in the early eighties was reactive in seeking to break up the triangular relations of collusion among employers, unions, and government that sustained the

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bankrupt British corporatism of the seventies. That it soon became pro-active in attempting to reshape British society and culture according to the crude abstractions of economic liberalism is to be accounted for by Thatcher's first and most fateful act of privatization—the privatization of policy making, whereby it was removed from the control of the Civil Service and contracted out to right-wing think tanks.

The New Right thought that these think tanks—above all, the Institute of Economic Affairs—had incubated during a long sojourn, throughout the fifties and sixties, in the political wilderness, was neither monolithic nor even particularly coherent. It contained a diversity of intellectual trends, of which Chicago economics, Virginia Public Choice theory, and elements of Austrian economics derived from the work of Hayek were the most prominent. Nevertheless, all of the think tanks—even the Center for Policy Studies, set up by Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher in 1975 as an explicitly Conservative foundation—found their intellectual inspiration not in any kind of conservatism, as that had been traditionally understood in Britain and in other European countries, but in classical liberalism. The most distinctive features of New Right ideology in Britain in the seventies and eighties—its use of an abstract and rationalistic conception of *homo economicus*, its doctrinaire pursuit of a general theory of minimal government, its individualist and legalist conception of contractual relationships as the basis of economic and social order and its utopian preoccupation with constitutional devices—are all symptomatic of its roots in classical liberalism. No British or other European conservative thinker has ever supposed that the principle of consumer sovereignty, together with institutions designed to prevent the capture of government by producer interests and a constitution protecting individual rights, could frame an adequate political philosophy; yet this thin gruel of economism and legalism was all that the political thought of the New Right had to offer. By contrast, the historicism and cultural relativism of British and European conservative thought, the criticisms of commercial society mounted not only by Disraeli but by Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson, by Carlyle and Southey, are absent from New Right political thought. The sharp critique of the Enlightenment developed by many conservative thinkers, even Burke, is similarly lacking.[2] The pervasive influences on New Right thought in Britain in the seventies and eighties were those of classical liberal rationalism, as that has been revised in our time by such thinkers as Popper and Hayek.[3]

New Right thought in Britain, then, was detached from the larger tradition of European conservative philosophy of which British conservative thought had always been a part. Its distance from its own intellectual and political tradition was widened by a further influence—that of the American right. It is useful to recall that the British New Right achieved its ephemeral hegemony in public discourse during the cold war, had its political expression in the most unequivocally (and uncritically) pro-American prime minister of the postwar period, and coincided with the combination in Reaganite America of a strongly anticommunist foreign policy with an intensely market-oriented domestic policy. This shared historical context made it all the easier for American rightist thought—the thought, that is to say, of neoconservatives and libertarians—to exercise an influence over British conservatism that was decidedly anomalous in terms both of Britain's European intellectual inheritance and of its underlying public culture. The virtual absence in the United States of anything comparable with European conservatism, the near-ubiquity in American intellectual culture of individualist, universalist, and Enlightenment themes—the fact, in other words, that in the United States conservative thought is merely a variation on classical liberal themes of limited government, individualism, and economic progress—made the kinship of the British New Right with the American right a matter of elective affinity and not merely of historical accident.

This kinship was strengthened by the opposition of most on the neoliberal right in Britain to European federalism.[4] For many on the New Right, and certainly for Thatcher, Britain's cultural affinities lay with the United States rather than with Europe. Thatcher may have had differences with Reagan, over the voodoo economics of self-financing tax cuts and the Strategic

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Defense Initiative, for example, but there is no doubt that she harbored the Churchillian fantasy of a transatlantic Anglo-Saxon civilization whose ties, reinforced by conservative hegemony in both countries, would not only renew the "special relationship" but also enable Britain and the United States to follow parallel paths of development, with Britain emulating American individualist market capitalism. In this Thatcher not only misread Britain's strategic situation, which is that of a European power, but misjudged British public culture, which differs from that of the United States in all the most crucially important respects.

In Britain, market capitalism has never enjoyed unqualified political legitimacy, being challenged by a powerful socialist culture and accepted by Tories prior to Thatcher only with deep reservations; religion is weak and society substantially post-Christian; and the Enlightenment faith in world improvement is lacking or qualified—as all ideological claims in Britain are qualified—by an enduring skepticism. More decisively, perhaps, for the fate of the neoliberal project, Britain remains a far less individualist society than the United States, with far more negative attitudes to geographical and occupational mobility, for example; and the relationship of the British people to the British state remains one of wary trust rather than of suspicion or enmity. It was ignorance of, or perhaps refusal to accept these profound divergences that made the interventions in British public discourse of such American ideologues and publicists as Charles Murray and Michael Novak ill-judged and predictably marginal. If Thatcher's project was the Americanization of Britain, these enduring features of British culture—which attest to its deeper affinities with the cultures of continental Europe—foredoomed it to failure.

The remaking of the Conservative party in the image of the Republican party cut the Conservatives loose from their moorings in British culture and in the history of their own party. The result has been a collapse of Tory support. As of May 1995 the Tories did not control a single metropolitan town council and only one county council. The Tories are paying the price of attaching their fortunes to an economic philosophy that recognizes only the human interest in increased income and consumer choice and fails to perceive the weightier interest people have in limiting their personal economic risk. In forgetting the truism of conservative philosophy that most human beings are risk-averse creatures, the Tories may have condemned themselves to replicating the fortunes of the Western-inspired economic liberals of the postcommunist countries, who have been swept from office by social-democratic parties that grasp this elementary truth.

In political terms, the most the Conservatives can hope for is to turn impending catastrophe into mere defeat at the next general election. Either outcome spells displacement for the Tory nomenklatura that staffs the institutions of the Quango state; and its members, along with sitting Tory MPs, will use every means at their disposal to limit the spell in opposition, which they cannot now avert. Within the British conservative intelligentsia it is not uncommon to find a period of opposition welcomed as a respite from power and an occasion for reflective thought. It is difficult to know, however, why Conservative thinkers believe that the leisure of opposition will allow them to address the profound changes in British society that Conservative policies have engendered or reinforced. For it is now wholly unclear what, if anything, British conservatism can coherently set itself to conserve. The hollowing out of the legitimacy of traditional institutions by economic and cultural changes that neoliberalism has accelerated makes a restorationist or revivalist policy orientation a hopeless dead end—as the farcical flirtation of the Major government with a "Back to Basics" rhetoric of family values showed. The halcyon England of the fifties conjured up by Major's nostalgist rhetoric, insofar as it has any semblance of historical reality, was an artifact of the Labor-led postwar settlement that the Conservatives have destroyed. Even if it were desirable to recreate it—which is more than doubtful—it is now irretrievable. A policy of cultural fundamentalism has attractions for some British conservative thinkers, nonetheless, because it enables them to avoid confronting the central contradiction in their thought and policy—the contradiction between endorsing the permanent revolution of the global market and the preser-

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vation of stable forms of family and community life.

Unfettered global market institutions overthrow settled communities everywhere, undermine the stability of families by imposing on their members the imperative of unceasing mobility, and dissolve traditional practices and institutions in a flood of novelty, but neoliberal conservatives are compelled to ascribe these changes to factors other than unchecked market forces. The explanation is then sought in relativistic doctrines supposedly propagated in schools and universities, in the legacy of sixties libertarianism, in media bias or similarly absurd conjectures. The social—and for that matter economic—failures of market fundamentalism are patched up, or at least obscured, by recourse to the atavistic fantasies of cultural fundamentalism. Only by invoking a conspiratorial elite of liberal intellectuals can the conservative intelligentsia explain to itself why—after sixteen years of neoliberal hegemony—the ordinary people it claims to speak for in Britain show every sign of consigning the Conservative party to electoral oblivion.

The political collapse of the New Right in Britain has many causes, including ones that are highly contingent, such as the adoption of the poll tax (which was one of the occasions of the Tory coup that toppled Thatcher) and the ignorance and hubris that led ephemeral neoliberal ideologues to proclaim in the eighties that "Labor will never rule again." It is still too early to attempt a balanced and comprehensive historical assessment of the conflicts of interest and personality, the errors in policy and the complex interactions of closed ideology and human folly with political power that have brought the neoliberal experiment in Britain to a close. It is not too early to elicit a couple of lessons from its whimpering debacle. The first is that the pretensions of the New Right to an intellectual hegemony in political discourse were always spurious. The neoliberal project achieved a transitory *political* hegemony in Britain because of an unrepeatable confluence of circumstances—the bankruptcy of Laborist corporatism, the disintegration of Soviet institutions, the decline of European social democracy, and the trend to eco-

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nomic globalization that weakened organized labor. It contributed nothing significant to conservative political thought; indeed, its policies have only speeded the obsolescence of conservative thought by illuminating its helplessness before the dominant economic forces of the age.

The second lesson is that there remains, in Britain at least, no historical space for coherent conservative thought. The historical possibility of serious intellectual conservatism has been closed off by the policies of the last decade and a half. To be sure, if history is any guide, the Conservative party will somehow renew itself, in the normal fortunes of political life in a two-party-system; but Tory England, which it existed to conserve, is already little more than a memory. Conservative thought, in this new historical circumstance, is likely to be a mixture of fashionable techno-utopianism—such as the proposition, recently seriously advanced, that the virtual communities of the Internet can replace the local communities that free markets have desolated—and opportunistic fundamentalism. This is not a form of thought from which illumination or guidance can reasonably be expected. The enduring human needs that conservative philosophy once acknowledged are not now addressed by conservatives, partly because meeting them entails radical and—for today's conservatives—unwelcome changes in current economic institutions. Meeting these human needs—for deep and strong forms of common life, fulfilling work, and a rich public environment—demands re-embedding the market processes that neoliberal policy has emancipated from any kind of political control or accountability in the cultures and communities they exist to serve. And this is a project, little short of revolutionary in its implications, that no form of conservative thought today is willing to contemplate. □

Notes

[1] I have considered the decay of the postwar British settlement during the Callaghan Labor government in more detail in my monograph *The Undoing of Conservatism* (London: Social Market Foundation, 1994), reprinted as Chapter 7 of my book, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (London: Routledge, 1995). I examined the contradictions of neoliberal ideology in the Introduction to my book *Beyond the New Right: Markets, Government and the Common Environment* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[2] An exception might be made for the thought of Michael Oakeshott, in which a criticism of the Enlightenment is obliquely pursued. However, though Oakeshott's thought was an object of reverence in the New Right think tanks, particularly the Center for Policy Studies, it was never an influence on policy—in the way that Hayek's was, say—and, no doubt wisely, he held himself aloof from quotidian politics. Analogously, Roger Scruton's *Salisbury Review* adopted a stance of Jacobitic or quixotic resistance to the spirit of the age, which sometimes encompassed opposition to aspects of economic liberalism; and its influence on practicing Conservative politicians was slight.

[3] I do not mean to imply that Popper's and Hayek's thought were at all points convergent, but only that neither of them belonged to a recognizable tradition of British or European conservative thought.

[4] Not all British classical liberals were, or are, opposed to European federalism. Sir Samuel Brittan, the distinguished economic commentator, is perhaps the most noteworthy among several exceptions.

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Joël Roman

A LETTER FROM PARIS

The French Left after the Presidential Election

American friends have asked me about the current political situation in France: Who is this Jacques Chirac, a politician from the right, who was just elected president after having run a more or less leftist campaign? Who is Lionel Jospin, who saved the honor of the Socialist party, the collapse of which everyone had predicted? And why, with all this, did a party of the extreme right win a solid 15 percent of the vote and take control of three cities in the municipal elections one month later?

Last winter, after Jacques Delors had declined to run in the presidential race, the left had practically disappeared from the political landscape. The political watchdogs had their eyes trained only on the right, predicting a runoff between Chirac and Edouard Balladur, with the left eliminated after the first ballot. Chirac maintained that the election was not a contest between the left and right, but one that pitted those (like Delors and Balladur) who had bowed to the economic dictates of the European community and the world market against Chirac himself, advocate of a return to politics and of a new emphasis on the fight against unemployment and *fracture sociale* (social disintegration).

Among the reasons for Delors's withdrawal, the one that must have weighed most heavily (although he was very tactful on this subject) was the state of the Socialist party. Michel Rocard went so far as to speak of a "disaster area"—which wasn't much of an exaggeration. Fourteen years of Mitterrandism had left the party anemic, without a platform, hesitating between radical ambition and liberal caution, mired in scandal and infighting, morally and politically discredited. It served more to deter than to support candidates. Therefore, when Lionel Jospin announced that he would run, he was greeted by widespread skepticism: here was a dark horse just out for the post parade.

The party's chairman, Henri Emmanuelli, decided that saving the party warranted his seizing control (following Michel Rocard's defeat in the European elections). Party members convened for a vote (not customary procedure in France or in the Socialist party). This provided the first democratic upset: they chose Jospin, the outsider, instead of the acting chairman. From this moment, Jospin's campaign went from strength to strength, despite a program cobbled together at the last minute.

The surprise of the first ballot was not that Chirac would lead Balladur, but that, upsetting all predictions, Lionel Jospin would come out on top of both of them. In France, which is so fond of polls (they are more numerous here than anywhere in Western Europe), the voters chose to contradict the polls.

For the left, the result marked a (brief) return of the promise of social transformation founded on genuine reformist convictions, a desire for increasing democratization, and a higher moral standard. It is impossible to ignore the 15 percent vote for the National Front (the extreme right party). However, the overwhelming majority of the electorate voted for the rehabilitation of politics and actually addressed the prevailing social problems.

Three questions come to mind: which direction will Jacques Chirac and his prime minister, Alain Juppe, ultimately take? What chance does Lionel Jospin have of effecting a complete renewal first of the Socialist party and then of the entire left? What must be done to turn back the National Front?

It is not easy to answer the first question. First of all there is the notorious versatility of

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Jacques Chirac, who in 1988 was quite clearly committed to a supply-side Reaganomics and yet in 1995 espoused a neo-Gaullist program including large-scale government intervention. Moreover, his refusal to dismiss the National Assembly leaves him at the mercy of a considerable majority that hardly intends any ambitious political change. Alain Juppe's government has little leeway for political action: the concern over increasing the budget deficit has constrained all its proposals. This does not bode well for a bold social policy. Nevertheless, the government was smart enough to make certain symbolic decisions, to appoint certain ministers, and to establish relations with the trade unions and the nonprofit organizations, all of which will prevent people from becoming too quickly cynical about the promises of change. The proof of the party's credibility will come next autumn when the extent of its determination to honor its campaign promises will be measurable. There is a great likelihood that we are witnessing a much more status quo politics than was promised—a politics that looks to an economic upturn to solve all the nation's problems.

Chirac's politics are cloaked in a grandiose neo-Gaullist rhetoric (the decision to recommence nuclear testing is emblematic), which seems ill adapted to the multipolar world in which we live. Nevertheless, he has contributed to the rehabilitation of the politician's role, breaking, if only briefly, with the idea of economic constraints, which is to say, the idea of the powerlessness of politics. This makes it all the more important that he realize the hopes he gave rise to. Otherwise, the sense of deception will swell the popularity of the National Front.

In some ways Lionel Jospin, on the left, has the same problem. The risk here is of a too rapid recovery of the Socialist party. Partly for reasons of in-house politics and partly for reasons relating to Jospin's strong showing in the presidential election and the credible results of the municipal elections, the party might exempt itself from any more profound examination of its conscience. But a pledge involving the future has been made, and here, too, any deception involving the substitution of a mere façade for the total renovation promised could have grave consequences.

The Socialist party needs to be both more ambitious and more modest: more ambitious in its programmatic agenda, more attentive to the demands of its constituency, stating clearly in the area of public welfare and economic policy what choices it intends to make and at what price; more modest in recognizing that although the largest part of the left, it is not the entire left, and that the left today is not monolithic and that in addition to its strictly political constituencies (communists and environmentalists, for example, who similarly must strive to become a credible political force) there is a very strong social constituency that no longer intends to entrust its projects to any political party. Undoubtedly, the greatest failure of Mitterrandism has been the frustration of these social expectations and the exacerbation of the political contempt directed at social movements—with which the Socialists were already heavily burdened. The promised rehabilitation will only be meaningful if it allows for a dialogue with militants who do not intend to surrender their positions for the sake of a hypothetical electoral victory.

As for the National Front, the question is simple: either our politicians choose unequivocally to confront it, by proposing solutions to the problems of which it is a symptom (unemployment and job insecurity, notably) or they can continue to manipulate it as they have done, borrowing its rhetoric and certain parts of its ideological emphases (as Charles Pasqua, former minister of the interior, was accustomed to doing) or, on the contrary, scapegoating it, denouncing it in purely ideological terms so as to assume the virtuous appearance of the morally outraged anti-fascist. In the latter case, there is every reason to believe that the National Front has a very bright future.

The various elections have provided the proof that a civic revival is possible in this country. Our democracy (others too, perhaps) faces a historic choice: either the rehabilitation of politics as deliberation and action in tandem or its reduction to the management and manipulation of the public's passions. In the latter case, inevitably, these passions will be prodigious.

Translated from the French by GILLES DEVOS □

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Stephen Tindale

EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Environmentalists have an ambiguous, even paradoxical, attitude to European integration. Many advances in environmental protection—in relation to water quality, air pollution, or habitat protection—have come from European Union (EU) legislation. Yet many environmentalists, particularly "deep greens" or fundamentalists, remain opposed to the whole notion of supranational integration.

To understand this paradox, one has to go back to the origins of the European project. Jean Monnet and the other "Founding Fathers" hoped to create a United States of Europe through explicitly political means, notably a defense association between France and Germany. When this failed, they fell back on a more indirect, incrementalist approach: creating economic links and emphasizing the material self-interest to be derived from cooperation.

Only in the mid-1980s, with the signing of the Single European Market Act, was the environment given formal status as a matter for concern at the European level. By this time, the central pillars of the European integration had already been designed, without taking any account of environmentalism. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is a classic example of the pattern of creating wealth first and then spending a small proportion of it on remedying the damage. By maximizing production, the CAP has lead to intensive farming with devastating effects. There are now attempts to mitigate the impact, for example, by declaring some sensitive areas special environmental zones. But nothing is being done to alter the fundamental problem, that the policy gives farmers an incentive to overproduce by guaranteeing a price for their produce.

A second problem that environmentalists have with the EU is that it is founded on a belief in the power of technology in general, and nuclear power in particular. Thus, when acid rain became an issue of public concern in the 1980s, the response of the EU was not to implement energy efficiency policies, but to set emissions standards for power stations that required the fitting of pollution abatement equipment. When air quality became an issue, the response was not to alter transport policies, but to move to require the fitting of catalytic converters (which have been mandatory in Europe only since 1993). This desire to find technological fixes is, in the eyes of many environmentalists, an excuse to avoid confronting the more fundamental issues of lifestyle and consumption patterns. It also pits environmentalists against industrialists, since pollution abatement is expensive. In these confrontations, environmentalists generally lose.

The Single European Market Act pleased the green lobby by writing the environment into the treaty for the first time. Far more significantly, however, the act set up the institutional arrangements to facilitate the creation of the single market by abolishing all non-tariff barriers to trade within the EU. Countries with high environmental standards, such as Germany and Denmark, feared that they would be forced to lower them to meet single-market obligations.

Such fears have been allayed by rulings by the European Court of Justice (the EU's Supreme Court) upholding the view that states have a right to set environmental standards higher than those agreed upon within the EU, as long as these are aimed genuinely at protecting the environment. In one famous case, Denmark was allowed to maintain a ban on non-returnable bottles, even though this disadvantaged non-Danish companies.

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However, the advanced countries were dissatisfied. They wanted not only the right to set their own high standards, but also the ability to raise their neighbors' standards. In negotiation after negotiation in the 1980s, proposals for higher standards championed by Germany, the Netherlands, and Denmark were held up by the opposition of Greece, Spain, and, above all, the United Kingdom (UK).

In the intergovernmental negotiations leading to the Treaty of Maastricht, therefore, a group of countries led by Germany insisted that the national veto over environmental issues should be removed. Surprisingly, when it came to the final negotiation all countries agreed, including the UK, which may have seen this as a concession worth making to secure its opt-out from new arrangements for social and employment policy. The Treaty of Maastricht thus extends the operation of majority voting (that is, with no state having a veto) to most environmental legislation. There are exemptions for issues such as environmental taxes, energy policy, and land-use planning, but this still leaves scope for serious political controversy on matters like air quality standards or drinking water quality.

So far the issues that have been decided on majority voting have been relatively uncontentious, but this is a controversy waiting to happen, and it could flair up on the issue of environmental liability. A number of European countries want to introduce a Europe-wide strict liability regime, with many similarities to the "Superfund" arrangements. Britain opposes a Europe-wide scheme, and wants a less strict approach, but may be outvoted when legislation comes before the European Council of Ministers.

The Maastricht Treaty also makes explicit the EU's formal commitment to "sustainable growth respecting the environment." This brings the EU into line, at least rhetorically, with the post–Earth Summit discourse about sustainable development. The reality remains, however, that European economies operate on the basis of "Create wealth first, clean up the mess later."

It was in this context that the European Commission's White Paper *Growth, Competitiveness and Employment* (known as the Delors White Paper) was published. Much of this is a conventional analysis of economic difficulties and challenges, but toward the end of the paper comes a wide-ranging and potentially revolutionary discussion of the nature of economic activity in Europe and the need for "a new development model." The paper observes that our economies "over-consume nature and under-consume people" and that the "substitution of labor by capital has been accompanied by a continued increase in the use of energy and raw materials, leading to an over-exploitation of environmental resources."

We need, therefore, to refocus the economy away from the inefficient use of resources and waste creation and toward "eco-efficiency" and employment. The burden of taxation should be shifted off labor and onto pollution and waste.

We should not, of course, be carried away with optimism just because of a single white paper, particularly when the main protagonist, Jacques Delors, has now retired. The new president of the commission, Jacques Santer, has so far shown little interest in either the environment or a new development model. Moreover, when the European Commission proposed a fiscally neutral carbon/energy tax that would have been used to reduce other forms of taxation, the measure was defeated.

The victory of Jacques Chirac in the French presidential elections has added to the pessimism of environmentalists. Chirac has already demonstrated his contempt for them by announcing the resumption of nuclear testing in the South Pacific. His party showed a similar antigreen tendency when, shortly after it won the legislative elections in France, it joined the British government in an assault on European environmental policy, under the broad heading of a drive for deregulation and subsidiarity.

However, there are also some grounds for optimism. Europe's willingness to roll back on environmental policy will surely be restrained by the fact that this is one area in which action by Brussels is popular with electorates. Monetary union, defense cooperation, lifting of border controls, all are opposed by a majority of Europeans. In contrast, attempts by Brussels to clean up the air or safeguard the seas are welcomed, partly because it

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is clear that the nation-state is too small a unit to tackle such issues, and partly because in much of Europe national governments have been unwilling even to try. As the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference approaches, and pro-European politicians seek ways to relaunch the integrationist project, environmentalists have a chance to highlight the popularity of green initiatives. Another reason for optimism is the inevitable expansion of the EU into Central and Eastern Europe. The inclusion of Sweden, Austria, and Finland, which joined at the beginning of this year, has already strengthened the hand of the pro-environment group within the Council. The incorporation of Eastern Europe will help in a different way, primarily because it will precipitate the final collapse of the Common Agricultural Policy. A policy based on price support cannot possibly be extended to an agrarian society such as Poland without a massive increase in the EU's agricultural budget and that, fortunately, is not a practical proposition. Within a decade the need to incorporate Eastern Europe into the EU will lead to the reform of the CAP so that it supports farmers' incomes rather than prices. This will remove the incentive to over-produce, and cut the pressure to farm over-intensively. Nothing could do more to restore Europe's rural habitats.

A third cause for optimism is the increasing pressure on Europe from international environmental agreements, in particular the Convention on Climate Change, signed at the Rio Summit in 1992. The first follow-up meeting, held in Berlin earlier this year, committed all developed nations to negotiate targets for greenhouse gas reductions after the year 2000. The EU is currently not even on course to meet the original target, a return to 1990 emissions levels by the year 2000. Yet its negotiating stance at Berlin was progressive, leading the call for post-2000 reductions targets. If Europe is to avoid a major international embarrassment, it will need to adopt a coherent strategy on climate change, emphasizing energy conservation and improved efficiency.

A final reason for hope is the existence of a new institution, the European Environment Agency. At present it is limited to collecting and disseminating information about the state of the European environment. Even this is likely to increase public concern and pressure for action. But its role will certainly evolve, and could well come to include an enforcement element. The British government has suggested that the agency should oversee the activities of national pollution inspectorates, to ensure that environmental legislation is properly implemented. This would be a significant advance.

Above this rosy scenario, however, hangs an ugly cloud. For all its green rhetoric, the EU remains a capitalist club dedicated to the promotion of free trade. It is predicted that economic growth resulting from the single European market will lead to a massive expansion of freight travel, and most of it will be carried by road. The program designed to respond to projected traffic growth and to help peripheral regions, the Trans-European Networks, is dominated by proposals to build new highways. The new transport commissioner in Brussels, former Labor party leader Neil Kinnock, has reacted to widespread concern by beginning to emphasize rail networks as well. But nothing so far proposed matches up to the scale of the challenge. European transport policy remains rooted in the 1960s, when the emphasis was entirely on building new roads. This is perhaps the ultimate test of the EU's environmental credentials. Will it prove possible to reconcile increased trade and movement of goods with environmental protection? Or will those who have always argued that environmental protection and supranational integration are fundamentally incompatible be proved correct? The answers are as unclear as the air over Europe. □

Emanuel Geltman
1914 -1995

We mourn the loss of our friend and comrade Emanuel (Manny) Geltman. He was a founding editor of Dissent and a mentor to many in the socialist movement. His death came as we went to press. More complete tributes will appear in our Winter issue.—Eds.

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Marc Epstein

POSTCARD FROM PYONGYANG

We were a bit surprised when our Comrade-Guide, as he insisted we call him, gave in to our demands for a department store visit. Until then, touring North Korea had been a frustrating experience. Herded from one scenic spot to another, hustled through public streets and hindered from talking to locals, we found that the trip seemed hopeless. At last, then, our group—journalists pretending we were tourists—had arrived, a sunny afternoon in downtown Pyongyang. We made our way through the crowd in Department Store Number 1, surrounded, or so we thought, by those "brainwashed citizens of the last Stalinist State" we had read about.

Brainwashed? Couldn't say. But there was something wrong with this place. On the street outside, there was not a single pedestrian in sight. The customers seemed to file out of the subway and into the store, like an army of toy soldiers. And why were all the men wearing ties? Inside, cigarette lighters lay painstakingly arranged on a shelf, undisturbed, as if none had ever been bought. Books and note pads were in neat even piles, obviously untouched. Even prices were bizarre: why pay over two thousand North Korean *won* for an accordion if a bicycle costs less than two hundred? A middle-aged woman approached a sales clerk. "I'd like a yellow sweater," she said in a flat tone. Without hesitating, the assistant reached behind her and picked up the sweater, already waiting. The customer paid for it and walked away. "That was quick," I thought. No haggling over price, size, or color. Was it for her son? Was it for herself? Would it even fit? Later on, as we left the store, I looked back and saw the same woman again. This time, however, she had given back the yellow sweater and was walking off. But of course! The whole store, all five floors of it, was staffed by actors, hundreds of them, pretending to buy and sell. For the benefit of a few visiting tourists, they were there to perform, to pretend that they were living in a "normal" country, one with no shortages or restrictions of any kind.

There is nothing normal about North Korea. In the age of the Internet and mass transportation, Kim Il Sung's regime—which has survived its founder's death, over a year ago—has successfully isolated its twenty-two million inhabitants from the rest of the world. Their miserable condition is reminiscent of Ceaucescu's Romania, Hoxha's Albania, and Orwell's *1984*. Every citizen wears a lapel pin—"You must call them portraits," instructed our Comrade-Guide—with the dictator's face on it. Traveling abroad is forbidden (of course) and a strict pass law makes moving about the country virtually impossible. Private cars are absent, "so as to avoid the effects of pollution." Until a few years ago, bicycles were condemned as "signs of backwardness." More important, they could facilitate a popular uprising.

In this land of overt lies and deception, mysteries abound. One of the biggest is fifty-three-year-old Kim Jong Il, Kim Il Sung's son and apparent heir. He is said to be a connoisseur of old French cognac and young Swedish girls. He is also described as the owner of the largest private video collection in the world, over twenty thousand titles. Indeed, he enjoys movies so much that he arranged for the 1978 kidnapping of a South Korean director and his actress wife. When we visited the Korean Film Studios, the local equivalent of Hollywood, a guide explained that the Dear Leader, as he is known, had visited the studios 341 times and given over 2,500 in-

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structions to the workers. "They were very helpful to us," the guide added.

During our visit, we were taken to see the shooting of an outdoor film scene. Purporting to reproduce feudal costumes, the characters all donned flamboyant red dress. The director wore his stop-watch on a chain around his neck, the script-girl carried a clip-board, and the make-up artist stood by. Yet no one seemed to know what to do. "Action!" As the camera started rolling, I walked up for a closer inspection. Only one reel was moving. The camera was in fact empty. There was no film inside and they all knew it. Here we were, a group of foreign journalists acting as tourists, watching actors act like actors. Never before had I been to a place where, as night falls and you go to bed, your dreams simply replay the fantasies you live during the day.

Of course, there is nothing new about this sort of masquerade. André Gide, the gay French writer, visited Russia in the 1930s. As a French Communist party sympathizer, he wanted to see if life under Stalin really was the workers' paradise he had been told about. During his stay, Gide was taken to a swimming pool, on a supposedly ordinary weekday. He found dozens of athletic young men bathing in the water, laughing, and playing games. Encouraged to participate, he was naturally enchanted. A couple of hours later, as Gide drove away, he suddenly realized that he had forgotten his shawl and rushed back to get it. To his surprise, all the boys were out of the water, getting dressed . . . in Red Army uniforms.

North Korea's propaganda efforts may not be out of the ordinary for a totalitarian state, but they are remarkable in their total lack of credibility. More than once, I felt as if I were a spectator watching a theater production, with the backstage clearly visible. This would be fine as an artistic statement, but coming from a police state, it is simply odd.

Local propaganda never stops. Radios are not equipped with dials, only on/off buttons; just one station broadcasts—the government's. Some apartments have built-in radios, wired directly into the electrical supply. Residents have no way of turning them off. In rural areas peasants toil under speakers that update them on the latest slogans: "Socialism is science!" "Long live our Dear Leader Kim Jong-Il!" "Let us follow the polar star of humanity!" And, probably the best of all: "We are happy!" Those perceived as unhappy might end up in a labor camp. There are said to be two hundred thousand political prisoners behind bars—1 percent of the total population.

Even foreign-language students are deprived of books in other languages. Shakespeare's plays, for instance, have been "edited." Only children's books survive the censor's pen unscathed. The same is true for films. For generations of students of English, *Captain Nemo* and *Treasure Island* are the two classics of the American movie-making industry. Michael Jackson? Elvis Presley? The Beatles? "Never heard of them."

Guides encourage foreigners to "go anywhere" and to "talk to anyone." Yet as I walked back to my hotel one morning, a policeman in civilian clothes came running up to me. "How did you get out of your hotel room?" he asked. "Did you climb out of the window?" A short stroll through poor neighborhoods (that is, ordinary ones) easily justifies his concern. In the port of Wonsan, by the Sea of Japan, behind the façades of the main boulevard, people live in rundown farmhouses. Dogs from Manchuria seem to be the main source of protein. Grocery stores are empty. On the black market, peasants are rumored to sell items at forty times the fixed price. The official policy is "self-reliance," but rice shortages last summer forced the government to accept shipments from the South Korean "fascist puppet regime."

A few places of worship have opened in Pyongyang. Some analysts pointed to this as a sign of progress: after all, a 1960s edition of the North Korean dictionary had defined Christianity as "imperial policy that seeks to dominate people's minds." And yet, even these churches, touted as signposts of a supposed opening, are staged. In the Bongsu area of the capital, Li Songsuk, state employee, watches over the Protestant church. "Personally, I believe in God and Kim Il Sung. But this is a sign of weakness on my part. Kim Il Sung is the only real God of our country." Is there life after death? "No." Does paradise exist? "Yes." Is that not a contradiction? "I believe in paradise *before* death," she replied with a smile. "And it's here."

Paradise is the name of a Pyongyang suburb. □

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AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

No issue is more likely to set the tone of politics before the 1996 elections than affirmative action. In California affirmative action has already become a driving issue, as Democrats, Republicans, and independents argue about the California Civil Rights Initiative—a referendum that would prohibit the state and any of its subdivisions from using affirmative action in jobs, school admissions, or set-asides. DISSENT *asked a variety of writers to address the moral and political issues raised by affirmative action. Who benefits from affirmative action? What price does it exact? Can it be improved upon or is an alternative needed? What would happen without it?*

—THE EDITORS

Joanne Barkan

It was 1968, and I had applied to graduate schools in the field of French literature. Someone from Tufts University—a male dean or department chair, I can't remember—called to say the faculty had accepted my application. In fact, he chatted on, they had wanted to award me a National Defense Education Act fellowship (of which they had just one or two), but since I was a woman, they feared I might "go off and get married" without finishing my degree, and so they had given the fellowship to a nun.

Debating affirmative action in the United States today, it helps to keep in mind how we once lived in this greatest of all meritocracies. More than half the population—women (including nuns) and "minority men"—rarely had equal opportunity; some never had a fighting chance. But when sufficient social pressure forced the federal government to consider leveling the playing field, the struggle over how to do that began.

Americans *should* know (would t'were so) the basic history of the struggle: the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibited discrimination because of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. To overcome dogged southern opposition, the act's Title VII rejected the notion of preferential treatment. Create equal opportunity by eliminating barriers to individual freedom, yes; grant special help to members of aggrieved groups, no. As Lyndon Johnson signed the legislation, he and civil rights leaders knew that dropping barriers would help only individuals who had enough education, skills, and experience to compete—for example, members of the tiny black middle class. And the others?

When the ink was dry, Johnson began redefining affirmative action to mean preferential treatment for members of disadvantaged groups. Put a "thumb on the scale" to help them into training programs, schools, and entry-level jobs. Break open white strongholds (fire departments, for example) by requiring them to implement plans to include blacks. (Women entered the picture later.) With executive orders in 1965 and 1967, Johnson took steps to use the federal government's economic power (in hiring, awarding contracts, and making grants) to demand affirmative action plans.

Race-based preferences were not the reform-of-choice for civil rights leaders. Martin Luther King, Jr., and others understood the various pitfalls of racial preferences—social (they'd create white resentment and aggravate racial tensions), political (they'd undermine potential progressive coalitions), psychological (they'd stigmatize beneficiaries), and moral (they'd result in reverse racial discrimination). These leaders advocated instead reshaping the economy to create substantive equality of opportunity for all Americans. Like the rest of the democratic left, they wanted

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full employment, skills training, good public schools, national health care, affordable child care, and drug prevention for everyone. No one denied the existence of racism separate from economic issues, but rigorous enforcement of antidiscrimination laws *and* radical economic reforms seemed to add up to the most equality of opportunity.

We got none of the reforms. *Dissent* has told the story innumerable times of the U.S. economy's structural decline after 1970, the stagnation of real wages, and the expansion of poverty. To that story, we can add this observation: the period of economic deterioration coincides with the era of affirmative action.

Many conservatives claim affirmative action caused the economic problems (and most other domestic woes), but the opposite is true. Economic restructuring in favor of capital's globetrotting elite made Dr. King's vision impossible. The economy no longer generated the raw materials of big reform—strong growth, enough jobs with decent pay, and middle-class security that makes redistribution politically possible. We were left with a small flawed tool to equalize opportunity: affirmative action in the form of group preferences in contracting, employment, and education.

Even a poor tool can produce some good, and so did affirmative action. Looking at racial preferences (the almost exclusive focus of current debate), we see that minorities entered lily-white enclaves in the building trades, police departments, fire departments, other government services, and news bureaus. Elite institutions such as universities, law firms, corporate offices, and hospital administrations increased recruitment. The black middle class grew substantially. Assertions that racial preferences actually undermined progress, that the black middle class would have grown faster if affirmative action had not diverted attention from deeper reforms are counterintuitive. During twenty-five years of economic retrenchment for wage earners, where would progress have come from?

Opponents of race-based preferences stand on more solid ground when they reiterate the liabilities predicted in the 1960s. Yes, affirmative action has generated some, but not all, white resentment; along with other factors, it divides natural allies of a class-based progressive coalition; it has stigmatized beneficiaries in the eyes of some whites and some blacks; it helps too few; and it carries the moral burden of reverse discrimination. All the while, of course, a misdirected economy has aggravated the negative effects of affirmative action.

For some left-of-center pundits, the liabilities weigh too much. The Republican party, they argue, has used affirmative action so effectively as a "wedge issue" that progressives have no chance of rebuilding a majority as long as the policy continues. They propose substituting race with class (that is, economic disadvantage or ED). Based on measurable criteria—income plus assets, geographical concentration of poverty, and so on—schools and employers would give preference to the ED of all races; contracts would go to businesses owned by the ED or, better, to businesses hiring the ED. According to proponents, class-based preferences would help blacks and Latinos because they have disproportionately high representation among the ED.

From a left point of view, the most credible version of this class argument also puts a radical economic program at the center of its coalition-building politics. To repair the tragic legacy of racial subjugation, the reasoning goes, refocus efforts on the structural reforms that create true equality of opportunity. Strict enforcement of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1991 will deal with active discrimination.

Given the widespread unpopularity of racial preferences, class-based affirmative action (CBAA) of the left variety has an appeal. Its supporters claim that the right would like nothing more than to have the left dissipate itself defending race-based affirmative action. They make a strong point. Yet they might also harbor unrealistic expectations about the end of the old affirmative action. Considering the overall ascendancy of the right and the power of a financial elite hooked on deflationary policies, will it make a huge difference? Without the radical economic reforms, CBAA leaves most problems unsolved.

First, CBAA does nothing about the moral quandary or the problem of resentment. The small-town doctor's daughter who has the better record but loses a place at Stanford to the daughter of a small-town waitress still suffers reverse

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discrimination and may resent it. Second, CBAA helps too few people. Third, the not-good-enough-to-make-it-on-your-own stigma could stick to CBAA beneficiaries just as easily as to race-based ones. Some CBAA advocates insist racism produces the stigma, whereas mere class divisions will not. But this assurance means nothing if CBAA recruits are minorities. Fourth, CBAA looks just as vulnerable to a type of fraud that sometimes marred racial and gender set-asides in contracting. Well-off entrepreneurs can find ways to pass as economically disadvantaged.

Skeptics point out that black students might not get into high-ranking colleges under CBAA because low-income whites consistently test higher than low-income blacks. Not a problem, CBAAers respond. Just define economic disadvantage to include factors that will draw in blacks—for example, concentration of poverty in the high-school district. This logic exposes a troubling aspect of CBAA. Supporters often present the policy as a way to stretch the complex definition of economic disadvantage until it produces the same mix as racial preferences—but no one has to deal openly with *race*. CBAA doesn't assume we live in a color-blind society so much as *pretend* to assume it.

"Never underestimate the power of racism in the United States," Michael Harrington used to say to his comrades. The warning applies here. Whites have resented and resisted every effort blacks have made to achieve equality. In this respect, affirmative action is not a special case.

Still, leftists who support race and gender policies need to confront the political and moral liabilities. I would suggest two modest steps to start. First, drop the defensiveness about scrutinizing individual programs. Affirmative action begs for democratic management—for careful design and monitoring by the people who live with it. When a fair evaluation shows a program to be ineffective, fraud-ridden, wasteful, or unjust, the left should endorse revamping or dropping it. Honest inquiries will strengthen the case for affirmative action because they will undoubtedly reveal many successful programs.

Publicizing success stories is the second step. On television last spring, the editor of the *Trenton Times* mentioned that he runs an effective affirmative action program to the good of his newspaper. Although most Americans have no idea how such a program works, he said no more about it. The press described the University of California at Berkeley's high quality recruitment program in detail only after it came under Republican assault. Couldn't *Dissent* publish an ongoing series of thumbnail sketches from around the country, getting the information out before a crisis begins?

Small steps like these might persuade some citizens that the benefits of affirmative action still outweigh the liabilities. Meanwhile, left CBAAers will argue against race- and gender-based policies. The two positions can converge around a radical economic program—but that's for the unforeseeable future.

Cynthia Fuchs Epstein

Not long ago, perhaps a little more than a decade, perfectly "qualified" women and people of color couldn't get through the front door when it came to well-paying, prestigious occupations—or, indeed, many less attractive jobs. There were almost no black students and few white women in graduate and professional schools, not to mention in professorial ranks. In the legal profession, it was long difficult for women and blacks to obtain places in law schools, and later, in the best practices. There were no women carpenters, police, or salespeople in big-ticket items. And, of course, there were no male telephone operators.

Some things have changed a lot and some haven't. In films and on television we see fe-

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male and black detectives, doctors, explorers, and judges, but most women still work in occupations segregated effectively by sex and 97 percent of managerial posts are held by white men. Blacks generally lag behind, but there have been some significant advances, due especially to affirmative action programs or at least to affirmative action consciousness. As Andrew Hacker points out in his book *Two Nations*, in the past two decades the number of black police officers rose from 24,000 to 64,000, and black electricians from 14,000 to 43,000. Although the situations of women and blacks differ, they both suffered discrimination that effectively limited access to training and job opportunities. Black women suffered from double discrimination based on sex and race.

A number of highly specific programs have now created new opportunities for middle- and working-class women. I had some direct experience with one such effort, an important building block for affirmative action in general. In the early 1970s the Equal Economic Opportunities Commission (EEOC) filed an antidiscrimination suit against AT&T, and because of my past research on career obstacles to women, I was asked to testify on the company's behalf. They hoped I would show how culture and not any particular discriminatory practice led to sex segregation in employment. I declined. In 1973, AT&T settled with the government and crafted an affirmative action program.

One of the authors of that program was the AT&T staff person who had originally contacted me, and over the years I stayed in touch with him. With recent debates on affirmative action in mind, I reexamined the EEOC brief that, in 1971, chastised AT&T's practices, and then went to speak to him about the results of the program. The following picture emerges.

The Bell system, before its breakup, had a work force of roughly a half million women and a half million men—the largest single employer in the United States. When the EEOC brief was written, 92.4 percent of jobs were, effectively, classified by sex. Although the company claimed that 33.5 percent of managers were women, these were mostly supervisors of all female departments and almost none moved into general management. Women were operators, clerical and stenographic workers, and service representatives. These were all considered dead-end positions and were the lowest paid. Men had indoor and outdoor craft jobs as installers, repairmen, frame attendants, in construction and, of course, in the various layers of management. (As of 1970, 99 percent of telephone craft workers were male.) Black men were janitors.

When applying for employment, individuals had to take basic literacy and aptitude tests. Real job training was done once hired. Most, if not all, non-managerial hires came with few if any job-related skills, although "Ma Bell" liked to take on recent military veterans, especially for managerial posts. They were, one imagines, considered especially qualified given the military-like model that organized the company. Effectively, there was preferential hiring; it was somewhat sensitive to the market, but only selectively so. Notably, when whites were found to be "better" than blacks for operator jobs but wouldn't take them because of relatively poor wages, "requirements" were abandoned to encourage blacks to take the jobs. And in general, AT&T gave hiring preference to applicants with relatives already employed by the company; my informant told me that bonuses were given to encourage such family applications.

In Bell documents, pictures, pronouns, or straightforward identifications showed that all jobs were classified as male or female. Clearly, AT&T was long committed to sex segregation. "Opposite sex" employment for a categorized job was impossible except when a member of the "normal" sex was unavailable. Thus during World War II, women replaced men on most inside craft jobs, and during strikes or emergencies men staffed switchboards. But these were exceptions, and when a crisis passed, things went back to "normal."

Before it was challenged by the EEOC, AT&T found all this perfectly defensible. Since the 1964 Civil Rights Act permitted certain exemptions on the basis of bone fide occupational qualifications, Bell managers managed to maintain that males should be excluded from various jobs and women from others. On occasion the grounds were self-evidently ludicrous: men, it was claimed, were unsuited to be operators because on the job their knees, elbows, hands, and arms would often brush against their neighbor's

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bodies. It was intolerable to have men and women working together under such conditions. Moreover, the operators' chairs, switchboards, lounge and rest rooms were designed for women.

Much has changed in the last thirty years. Affirmative action has functioned along with transformations in the economy, changing technologies, and the break-up of the company. It is almost impossible to compare the changes in representation of women and minorities in "non-traditional" jobs and managerial positions numerically because the company no longer exists in its previous form, and in the past ten years all the components (AT&T and the "Baby Bells") have undergone considerable downsizing. Although not all of the original goals and timetables were achieved, those aspects of affirmative action geared to achieve a more level playing field with regard to recruitment and promotion have been successful. My informant told me that there is no question that affirmative action affected recruitment, training procedures, and promotion not only at AT&T but also at other companies with which he has been associated. Irrelevant criteria that only operated to exclude women and minorities have been eliminated. Hiring is no longer facilitated through networks of family and friends. Managers may not exercise the personal preferences in promotion that led to virtually all-male tracks. (He pointed out that not only did the "protected classes" benefit from this, so did white male workers who were not part of friendship circles or ethnic cliques.) There is no question that a considerable percentage of managerial jobs have opened to women and minorities. AT&T Network Systems, for example, hired minority applicants for eight of its eighteen MBA slots in 1993 and nine of twenty-four in 1994. True, few women climb telephone poles, but fewer workers overall do that, and women are well represented in the crafts. Women also supervise jobs that were once held entirely by men. Black workers are in crafts as well as at the switchboard, and they too have been able to move into managerial roles. Even in these times of job restructuring, diversity is an element considered by the companies when decisions are made to lay off people, so increased participation of blacks and women has been preserved.

I asked my AT&T informant if all this would have happened without affirmative action. His answer: "Definitely not." Would the changes continue without it? "The company is always sensitive to the politics from above." Fear of penalties and publicity has its impact, even if there have also been normative and institutional changes.

What has the program cost the company? He thinks that over all, benefits outweigh cost. Given changes in the labor force, AT&T can now draw on a much larger pool, ignoring previous classifications of who was and who was not appropriate for a given position. Many other companies concur, although they are usually loath to say so.

Opponents of affirmative action are probably more angry about the elimination of their advantages than concerned about a truly competitive market. In the cases I have studied, ensuring diversity opens rather than restricts the market.

Andrew Hacker

It is wrong, we increasingly hear, to give favored treatment to individuals simply because they have African ancestors. Hence, too, the argument that we no longer reserve places for persons of European descent, so it is time to remove race as a basis altogether. If race was bad as a barrier, it should not be used to justify preference.

Still, some who profess to a social conscience are offering an alternative. Instead of race, we might give special attention to all the individuals who have incurred disadvantages. For ex-

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ample, people who are born blind or who suffered serious abuse as children. But the principal proposal has been that affirmative attention be given to those who have endured hardships associated with low incomes.

At this point, well-off black applicants are often offered college acceptances—and even scholarships—ahead of white candidates from poverty-level homes. A race-blind system would cure that inconsistency, as well as allay much of the current resentment.

So let's see how such a program might work. In 1993, of the 1,044,465 high school seniors who took the Scholastic Aptitude Test, 148,319 came from families with incomes under $20,000. That these students may have had a less than auspicious preparation is suggested by the fact that their average SAT score was 798, measurably below the 902 average for the entire group. Presumably, then, special allowances would be made for low-income applicants, and they might be admitted with lower scores than more affluent candidates.

LOW-INCOME COLLEGE APPLICANTS

Numbers and Average SAT Scores for Students with Family Incomes under $20,000

Whites	60,324	40.7%	872
Blacks	36,034	24.3%	693
Latins	25,180	17.0%	734
Asians	19,827	13.4%	845
Others	6,954	4.6%	796
Total	148,319	100.0%	798

One premise is that a college seeking a diverse enrollment would want a sprinkling of poor students. Certainly, if it wanted that, it would admit a fair number of inner-city blacks along with whites who had been raised in decaying trailer parks. But first, we should look at the cohort of students in the under-$20,000 group. The accompanying table provides numbers and scores by students' ethnic backgrounds. To start, whites would get about 40 percent of the places set aside for this affirmative attention group. And together with Asians, they would take somewhat over half. Black students from low-income homes would receive a quarter of the special admissions and scholarships, considerably less than what they are now being offered when preferences are based on race. But the bottom line thus far is that the principal beneficiaries would be white.

But not so fast. Notice that all 148,319 of these students carry the low-income credential. However, certain priorities will have to be established, since there will very likely be limits on available places and financial assistance. Because all are poor, the obvious ranking would be on academic merit. And to judge by SAT scores, the preference would clearly go to whites and Asians. Indeed, given the lower scores of black students, any special assistance for them would be seen as reverting to a racially based affirmative action. So the new dispensation would end up favoring Caucasians and Asians.

And who are these low-income teenagers? Where the Asians are concerned, hardly any are Laotians or Cambodians, because few of them are likely to get to the SAT table. In fact, most of the poorer Asians who do take the test have middle-class family backgrounds: over half of their parents attended college in their native countries. The poorest tend to be the most recent arrivals and have yet to establish an economic foothold. Also, they are still learning English, which explains why their children's scores are lower than those for poorer whites. Once Asians rise above $20,000, which most of them soon do, they start recording higher scores than whites at comparable income levels.

With regard to the low-income whites, very few were raised in Appalachian trailer courts. (Note that the entire under-$20,000 group makes up less than 15 percent of those taking the test.) Much like the Asians, the largest contingent among poor whites were raised in middle-class households and attended middle-class high schools. What makes them poor is that their parents have divorced and they are now living with their mother. Under the settlement, she gets the house, not least so the children can continue within the suburban school system. As is common in middle-class divorces, the mother's in-

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come goes down, since support payments are rarely generous and not many divorced mothers have well-paid careers. And as many fathers seek to avoid college bills, they often insist that the mother be listed as the sole provider.

The admissions director of an Ivy League school recently told me that his office grants millions of dollars in aid to erstwhile middle-class children whose parents have divorced. This is an apt example of how other institutions have to foot bills for personal decisions that have social consequences.

In sum, preferences ostensibly based on poverty will mainly benefit middle-class whites and Asians. Needless to say, the real losers will be black and Hispanic students, who will see their representation on college campuses dwindle by at least half and probably as much as two-thirds. I suspect that those calling for income-based affirmative action know this will be the result, and it is really what they want.

What will pass for preferences geared to low income can have application only at the educational stage. It is hard to see how special attention in hirings and promotions will be given to adult candidates because their parents happened to be poor.

Virginia Held

A favorite argument used by opponents of affirmative action claims that it undermines the very people it is supposed to help. Affirmative action, it is said, robs women and minority members of the respect they deserve for getting hired or promoted or admitted to colleges or professional schools. And women and minority members sometimes agree: because they are faced with slurs and innuendos about how they got their jobs or promotions or admissions only through affirmative action, they think they might be better off without it. Then they would be able to feel they got where they got through their own talents and merit, and everyone would agree.

There is no doubt at all that it would be better to get a job or a promotion or a school admission based on unbiased judgment that one deserves it rather than through the pressure exerted by affirmative action programs. It should be everyone's goal to bring about a society in which this would be standard operating procedure. But this is not the society that would exist without affirmative action, so the choice is not between bias-free employment and education decisions and maintaining affirmative action. What needs to be addressed is the very different question: given continuing discrimination, is it better for women and minority members to face the slurs and innuendos from the position of having a job or a promotion or a degree, or to face comparable slurs and innuendos about a lack of competence or merit from the position of not having the job or the promotion or the degree? The choice then becomes a great deal more realistic, and which judgment to make becomes much more clear.

Does discrimination continue in more than a few isolated incidents? No reasonable reader of an even semi-responsible newspaper can doubt that it does. My own academic field of philosophy is supposedly characterized by the ideals of reason and impartiality, and philosophers might be thought among those whose judgments would be least affected by bias. Yet bias remains prevalent. The faculties of leading graduate programs are still almost all white and all male. Although women have made significant inroads into the lower ranks of the profession and into the less than leading institutions, they are still passed over for the more privileged positions that have lighter teaching loads and chances to direct dissertations. Fewer than 7 percent of doctoral degrees in philosophy from all institutions in 1991-92 were awarded for dissertations advised by women. And the number of African-Americans in the profession is still shockingly low. Most of

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us know from personal experience how those with the power to decide on hiring, promotion, and admissions see outstanding merit in those most like themselves, in gender and race as well as outlook, and fail to see it in those without such resemblances. The idea that objective criteria such as test scores and grade-point averages can eliminate bias—for instance, in school admission policies—ignores the extent to which such scores inadequately assess whatever talents and merit are worth developing or employing.

The puzzle is how so many who would be harmed by the ending of affirmative action fail to see how they would be harmed. It seems part of the wider success of the right wing in persuading voters to accept their myths, and to imagine, still, that the programs of the Radical Right may bring them greater prosperity or social stability. What the left must concede is that the right has correctly understood that the battle is one of images, and that, so far, the right has won this battle, largely through its advantages in the ways the media work and are structured. The statistics on the widening gap between rich and poor or on growing poverty and homelessness have been washed aside by the stories of shiftless, violent youth and of welfare fraud. Reagan's mythic welfare queens stay with the audience, while the statistics never move it.

The right has succeeded in perpetrating the fraud that affirmative action means and requires unfair preference. The fact that quotas are not only not required but not permitted does not dispel the fables of minority privilege or gender advantage. In philosophy, again, it has been widely believed that new Ph.D.s who were women or minority members had an advantage based merely on group membership, not talent. The facts refute such claims. A report on the status of women in philosophy states that

> the perception that women are doing very much better than men in obtaining jobs in academia is not well founded .... 66% of the women [with 1986-1988 degrees] were employed on a full-time basis in the academy, while 65.9% of the men were. On other measures, however, they are not faring so well; of the 1986-1988 Ph.D.s, 62 men and no women were Associate Professors and 23 men and no women had tenure in 1989. (Report from the Committee on the Status of Women, *American Philosophical Association Newsletters,* Spring 1993, p. 42.)

But the perception in the profession shows no signs of abating.

What affirmative action does require is some *evidence* that patterns of discrimination are changing. Some of us can remember when Harvard had not one single woman among the over four hundred members of its senior arts and sciences faculty, and yet was claiming that no discrimination had occurred because Harvard simply picked the "best people." Or we can remember when the members of a previously all-male law school faculty proclaimed that they had "solved" their woman problem because they had hired one woman. It is highly unlikely that such practices would have changed without the background threat offered by affirmative action. Similarly, unions with a long record of reserving skilled positions for a virtually all-white and all-male membership showed no signs of yielding to reasoned argument alone; with affirmative action they can be required to show evidence of less discriminatory practices.

That greater diversity in education and employment benefits everyone is a story that could be made compelling. But if affirmative action gets submerged in the current frenzy of white male resentment, the modest progress toward greater justice in employment and education of the past few decades may be overwhelmed.

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Martin Kilson

Contrary to what many conservatives assert, preferential treatment is not something new to our patterns of public policy. Moreover, it has an ethical basis in what might be called a "higher public purpose"—that of undoing and compensating for a long history of discrimination and white supremacy.

When conservatives complain that affirmative action is "reverse discrimination," it is largely an ideological ploy; they don't extend their indictment to government programs that privilege and thereby foster mobility for assorted businesses, veterans, and farmers, among others. In any event, job market breakthroughs for African-Americans in the last three decades have hardly diminished job opportunities for white males.

It is perfectly legitimate for a democracy to employ compensatory or reparational public policies to correct massive, longstanding, and cruel injuries that have been done to citizens. It was to the credit of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations (and bipartisan Republican supporters) in the 1960s that they decided to face the issue squarely and forge affirmative action. And it is crucial that affirmative action, with the strong support of the mainstream African-American leadership (the civil rights community), was democratized by its extension to women and Hispanics.

Right-wing foes prefer, of course, to define affirmative action in terms of its flaws. There are indeed real flaws and they need to be remedied—*remedied*, not manipulated politically so that it appears to white Americans that black Americans are recipients of illegitimate social benefits. On the contrary: affirmative action is a question of correcting what Harvard's Nathan Glazer aptly characterizes as the "distinctive condition of American blacks, scarred by a history of oppression...[and] still uniquely isolated and segregated." (It is heartening that Glazer, previously a leading proponent of the "reverse discrimination" charge, reversed his position in his *Wall Street Journal* article, "Race not Class," on April 5, 1995.) In their opposition to affirmative action, American right-wingers are reminiscent of postwar German foes of reparations to compensate for the destruction of Jewish lives and life-chances, personhood, and property by the Nazi state. Both cases entail denial of victimization and responsibility.

Too many whites fail to recognize that white mobility in twentieth-century America has received considerable affirmative assistance not only by public policies at many levels, but by buddy and status networks, all of which were concurrent with policies that massively excluded blacks. They would prefer to believe that mobility was strictly a product of self-reliance and merit, and they assume that affirmative action on behalf of blacks simply discards merit. Both assumptions are untrue. Affirmative action has used a modified merit paradigm in tandem with regular merit processes, and this has initiated breakthroughs in education, in access to the middle classes and to top-level jobs that previously excluded blacks, women, and Hispanics. Affirmative action's modified-merit approach enables those who have been excluded to attain educational and professional experience, thereby permitting their future performance to be governed fully by merit. There is what I'd call a "pragmatic interface" between modified- and full-merit processes.

The result of affirmative action has been considerable achievement by the "mobile strata" of African-Americans—stable working-class, middle-class and upper-middle-class households. These now make up nearly 65 percent of black households. Family income data for 1990 show that some 246,000 black households earned $50,000 to $55,000; some 92,000 households earned more than $70,000; and 8,000 earned more than $100,000. Sustaining such success is a crucial goal of supporters of affirmative action, together with alleviating the poverty crisis of the 30 percent of black families who are not

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mobile—the "static strata."

Affirmative action has been essential to the advancement of African-Americans in job markets that were long out of bounds. Here are some examples of the percentages of blacks in various occupations (as of 1990): 2.1 percent of 630,000 marketing and public-relations managers; 6.3 percent of 302,000 property and real estate managers; 6.7 percent of 882,000 computer programmers; 15.5 percent of 192,000 educational and vocational counsellors; 7.6 percent of 1,325,000 accountants and auditors; 7.2 percent of 479,000 therapists; 7.1 percent of 2,494,000 registered nurses; 2 percent of 83,000 biological scientists; 7.2 percent of 1,640,000 engineering technicians. The military also provides interesting statistics. In 1970 barely 2 percent of the officers in the armed forces were black; twenty years later, thanks (partly) to affirmative action, 12 percent of officers were African-American. As of last year 6.5 percent of U.S. Army generals were black, 5 percent of colonels, 8.3 percent of lieutenant colonels, and 12.5 percent of majors.

Serious merit processes are not threatened by intelligent affirmative action practices. (The career of General Colin Powell, the first African-American to head the Joint Chiefs of Staff, makes this abundantly clear.) At the same time, it is evident that the progress I've outlined here would hardly have taken place without affirmative action.

Michael Lind

Racial preference, the policy for which "affirmative action" is a deliberately misleading euphemism, is endorsed by its defenders as a means for achieving many worthy ends. Of one thing there can be no doubt: racial preference has been the chief means by which, since the sixties, American liberalism has committed suicide.

Or rather, a certain kind of liberalism, the multicultural liberalism of multicultural theory and identity politics. Apart from the misappropriated name, this multicultural liberalism has nothing in common with nineteenth-century classical liberalism or twentieth-century social-market liberalism. Under the aegis of multicultural liberalism, the New Deal coalition based on working-class whites has disintegrated and been replaced by a fossilized New Left coalition of upper-middle-class white social liberals and members of the black and Hispanic professional classes addicted to government preferences and corporate tokenism. This Marcusean left coalition of feminists and minorities (minus the college students) is anything but "progressive." Indeed, it is racist, snobbish, and antidemocratic, authoritarian, and profoundly insincere.

The multicultural left is racist, insofar as it has abandoned the trans-cultural Enlightenment humanism that informs liberal nationalism and liberal cosmopolitanism alike for a racial and ethnic mysticism described euphemistically as "celebration of difference" and "diversity." This biocultural romanticism has swelled from tributaries in nineteenth-century German racial mysticism (passed on by W.E.B. Du Bois, a student in Berlin of Treitschke) and the post-colonial French third worldism that has so influenced today's would-be "diasporic" intellectuals. Nor is racism hard to find in the paternalism of white leftists and liberals who assume that nonwhite Americans—not only blacks, but so-called Hispanics and so-called Asian and Pacific Islanders—are so feeble that they can never advance in American society unless enlightened whites waive the rules and lower standards on their behalf. These enlightened whites, it is presumed, are found mostly in the college-educated upper middle class. The degrading, quasi-zoological term "white males" (adult human "males," of any race, are *men*) has acquired distinct and pejorative class connotations that should make people who are *really* left of center squirm.

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They are benevolent authoritarians, Fabian technocrats, the proponents of race-based social engineering. They prefer to circumvent democratically elected legislatures whenever possible, in order to impose their vision of numerical racial balance in every profession and subculture (except, perhaps, their own) by means of court orders and executive orders. Enlightened despotism in the area of race relations is necessary, we are told, because most legislators either share or must defer to the supposedly irremediable racism of the white majority. Fortunately—if the multicultural left is to be believed—white liberal political appointees and white liberal federal judges, along with their academic and journalistic cheerleaders, constitute the one group of white Americans who are somehow capable of transcending their prejudices and becoming disinterested ephors, unmoved movers, a collective *pouvoir neutre.* The multicultural left, with its contempt for a caricatured white majority, makes the Federalists of 1800 look in retrospect like radical populists.

Not the least among the sins of multicultural liberalism is the corruption of language. For centuries liberals have sought to use the reagent of plain, clear language to dissolve the obfuscations of power. Multicultural liberals, in power, obfuscate. They employ two languages—a ritual public dialect compounded of euphemism, legalese, and pseudo-scientific jargon ("goals and timetables," "remedies," "diversity") and a private language of ends-justify-means utilitarianism ("Without quotas, there won't be any blacks on campus"). The insincere judicial-academic mode of liberal public discourse, as much as anything else, explains the attraction of many intellectuals of my generation to the right. Conservatives in the seventies and eighties may have been wrong on many things, but at least they tended to say what they meant. The people who passed for liberals, though, tended—to use a term coined by the great Texan New Dealer Maury Maverick—to speak gobbledegook: "Quotas? Why, we're against quotas, too! We're just in favor of *numerical goals*."

After thirty years in which the multicultural left has dictated the civil-rights agenda of American liberalism and even formulated the weird scholastic patois in which conventional liberals discuss civil rights, what is the result? Though black and Hispanic middle classes, if the term can be used for elites so dependent on public patronage, have been artificially created or enlarged, conditions in the inner cities are worse than ever. While gender quotas have disproportionately benefited upper-middle-class women in college admissions, employment in the professions, and government contracting, the wages of most women, along with those of their husbands, have plunged. Racial preference is not the cause of these problems—but by alienating indispensable white voters it makes impossible the kind of transracial political coalition that might pressure politicians to ameliorate them.

Some left-of-center politicians and activists persist in thinking otherwise. In recent years liberal Democrats have tended to run as populist defenders of the economic interests of the transracial working and middle classes—and then, in power, to pass out jobs and entitlements on the basis of race. This policy of using economic entitlements to bribe white voters to tolerate anti-white discrimination, while dismissing legitimate criticism of racial preference as nothing more than conservative demagogy, worked for a while. No more. After thirty years of defections by white voters, in the North as well as the South, the Democrats have finally lost Congress, and are likely to lose the White House again as well. The Democratic party may soon be the "minority party" indeed—the party of blacks and Hispanics (plus Jews frightened by the religious right). The cruelest irony of all is this: unless they are dismantled, in the years to come racial preferences, designed to help black Americans, are likely to be turned against blacks by Hispanic politicians and activists seeking to maximize the Hispanic take from the racial spoils system.

The multicultural left that masterminded and defends racial preference cannot be reformed. It needs to be defeated and replaced by a generation of liberals, in temporary alliance, if necessary, with conservatives, in a campaign to purge American law of racial preferences and racial labels. That would be their only concession to conservatism. Twenty-first-century American lib-

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eralism should seek its inspiration in New Deal social-market liberalism and in the color-blind integrationism of the early Civil Rights Revolution—and find a new social base in working-class and lower-middle-class white, Hispanic, and black Americans (listed in order of their relative size in the twenty-first-century U.S. population).

A new, integrationist, social-market liberalism need not—indeed, must not—ignore the persistence of both active racism and the effects of centuries of white supremacy. Racial discrimination against particular individuals, in cases of proven harm to those individuals, should be rigorously punished under federal anti-discrimination law, even as racial preferences are abolished. As for the "vestiges of racism," embodied in an American class system that perpetuates the older American caste system, these, without exception, can be combated by race-neutral means. Ghetto poverty and welfare dependency? The race-neutral remedies might include mandatory, well-remunerated workfare plus residential deconcentration. Decrepit inner-city schools? Equalization of school funding by state and federal governments. Old-boy networks among whites in unions and law firms? Rigorous antinepotism and job-advertising laws, modeled after some in social-democratic Europe. The dilution of black and Hispanic political power? The adoption of proportional representation and, possibly, cumulative voting for local, state, and congressional elections. Lack of health coverage for many black and Hispanic Americans? Universal, guaranteed, portable health care benefits for all American citizens.

Achieving these egalitarian social reforms will be politically difficult, after racial preference is abolished. Achieving them will be politically impossible, *unless* racial preference is abolished.

Nicolaus Mills

Thirty years ago in a 1965 speech delivered at Howard University's commencement, Lyndon Johnson set out the terms on which his administration intended to pursue affirmative action. More than civil rights legislation was needed in order to achieve racial equality, the president insisted. With this in mind, he came to the heart of his speech, a short, one-sentence paragraph in which he declared, "You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, 'You are free to compete with all others,' and still justly believe you have been completely fair."

In trying to sum up America's racial struggles in a metaphor that did them justice, Johnson was following a long presidential tradition. In 1820, Thomas Jefferson, himself a slave owner, described the slavery issue as a "fire-bell in the night." In that masterful figure of speech he captured the danger of racism and the nation's need for rescue from it. But Johnson's hobbled runner analogy was more complex in the scenario it laid out and in its redefinition of racial justice.

In the 1960s the standard metaphor for achieving fairness in civil rights had been that of a level playing field, and the example everyone pointed to was Jackie Robinson, baseball's first black major leaguer. Robinson, liberals argued, showed how quickly society could be transformed by the removal of racial barriers. Johnson's point was that the transformation of society was not going to come so easily for most black men and women.

By switching the fairness metaphor to a foot race and then declaring that some runners had been hobbled by chains, Johnson introduced two important refinements. He factored into the equation the impact of slavery and Jim Crow, and he argued that more than a level playing field was required if the inequities of the past were not to be frozen in the present.

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We have come a long way from Lyndon Johnson's definition of affirmative action. Today, race and, by extension, gender and ethnicity have become proxies for affirmative action eligibility. We are no longer content that affirmative action be retrospective. We now use it as a way of making a school or work force representative of the population as a whole, and we do not bother to ask if those benefiting from affirmative action have actually been victimized by past law or practices. A recent immigrant of color is as eligible for affirmative action as an African-American who can trace her ancestry and victimization back to the seventeenth century.

As a consequence, affirmative action hangs by a thread, an easy target for conservatives who never wanted it in the first place, and difficult to defend for liberal politicians, who find it alienating them from working-class voters. On top of all this, there were the momentous events of the summer. In a series of sweeping decisions, the Supreme Court dramatically reduced the scope of affirmative action in voting rights, in business, in education; and the University of California Regents, under heavy prodding from the governor, voted to do away with all affirmative action programs based on race or sex.

What is to be done? The first and most obvious answer is to make sure that in the 1990s affirmative action does not take on burdens it cannot bear. Immigration is a prime example. By allowing immigrants who have come to America in the last two decades to benefit from affirmative action, we have undermined the historic rationale for it. But even more important, we have allowed ourselves to lose a sense of the specialness of affirmative action. If it is to be meaningful—and sacrificed for—affirmative action cannot be defined so broadly as to be nothing more than a permanent minority entitlement.

For liberals, the danger of such a redefinition of affirmative action is that it makes it seem as if they are sliding toward those who have no real interest in racial or gender equality in the first place. But in that danger lies opportunity. The left needs to acknowledge all that affirmative action cannot do: not in order to retreat to the right, as the Clinton administration seems bent on doing, but in order to resume the unfinished business of building a truly genderblind and color-blind society. Over the last decade the problem with affirmative action is that it has distracted from this larger task, making liberals worry more about compensating for the past than undoing it altogether. The time has come to get back to a politics of fundamental change, aimed at achieving the kind of equality that doesn't require compensatory programs.

Richard Rodriguez

President Bill Clinton is a Southerner. That fact alone may explain why, given the opportunity to rethink the logic and effect of affirmative action, he failed. In his July speech at the National Archives before a largely black audience, the president floated old platitudes. Several weeks earlier, I was talking to a roomful of black teenagers, most of them street kids or kids from the projects. Only one of them in a room of thirteen had ever heard of anything called affirmative action.

First in line to shake hands with the president after his speech were members of the Congressional Black Caucus. Who among these distinguished representatives could tell Mr. Clinton why, after three decades, affirmative action has had so little effect on the lives of the black poor? Why, despite affirmative action, are black teenagers killing each other a few blocks from the Capitol?

Forty or fifty years ago, in the segregationist South, the strategy of the civil rights movement was clear and it was noble. Where segregation was legally enforced against the entire race, as

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at Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, one black child could walk through the school door and change things for her entire race. Future historians, I think, will find it significant that affirmative action began during the administration of a Southern president (Johnson). Affirmative action will unravel during the administration of our current president, from Little Rock. For affirmative action has depended on an understanding of racism and integration appropriate to the American South.

In the late 1960s, when the civil rights movement turned north, its strategy was unchanged, despite the fact that Northern segregation was de facto and, consequently, very different from the legally enforced segregation of the South. In the North, however, one merely heard the familiar call for "integrating" Harvard and Berkeley. And then one saw the odd parade that continues today, the parade of middle-class Americans demanding to be included among "minorities." White women became minorities. And Asians. And Hispanics—who are an ethnic group—began to impersonate a racial group, a new brown race. Who was a minority? It was easy for any bureaucrat to tell you. If your group was numerically underrepresented, then you qualified. Which meant, in the end, that the only group that didn't qualify was the white male heterosexual.

In the South, in the fifties and sixties, one black child could change the predicament of an entire race. But in the North, how did three or four hundred undergraduates admitted to Harvard through affirmative action change conditions for black kids in Roxbury? In the early years of affirmative action at Harvard or Berkeley, one heard blather about "role models" and "returning to help your people." The embarrassing fact was that the primary beneficiaries of affirmative action were mainly middle class. And worse: those on the inside gained their label of "minority" because of their supposed relationship to a larger number of people on the outside. Which led to guilt. Middle-class undergraduates knew that they were gaining on the backs of the poor.

The political left is in disarray today. The old ideals have turned to soggy cake. The left in America used to be centered on the concern for economic disparity. When race became the sole metaphor for social division, American leftists forgot all about the poor. The white poor, especially, got written out of the liberal agenda. Now the left is preoccupied with power—its own—and with visions of social change that run from the top down. Lyndon Johnson is notorious for his "domino theory" in Vietnam. But many leftists today have their own domino theory. They insist that by creating a female or a nonwhite leadership class at Harvard or Citibank, people at the bottom will be changed.

Dear President Clinton: If I were a member of the Congressional Black Caucus and had your ear, I would urge you to declare the year 1996 the "Year of the First Grade." Forget Harvard! Forget Citibank! Reform education from the bottom up. Save poor children in those first years of school, when so many otherwise get lost. Reform our public schools—or else support school vouchers. And save poor whites along with poor blacks.

Jesse Jackson was in San Francisco in July comparing the effort to salvage affirmative action at the University of California to the "racial struggles of the 1960s." Mr. Jackson, alas, remains in a time warp. California in the 1990s in no way resembles Alabama in the 1960s. Already, California presents a linguistic nightmare to affirmative action bureaucrats because a majority of us can now claim to be minorities.

Like Lyndon Johnson, Bill Clinton is often described as a novice in international affairs—"more interested in domestic issues." I disagree. President Clinton strikes me as a novice in domestic matters. Despite his years at Yale and Georgetown, or perhaps because of them, he has never been able to see America in terms larger than those he first gleaned as a boy in the segregationist South. He has nothing new to tell us about affirmative action.

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Jerry Watts

Some wise American once argued that our laws protecting freedom of speech do not extend to the individual who falsely yells "fire" in a crowded theater. Likewise, freedom of speech should not allow a group of black faculty members to yell "affirmative action" in a crowded, predominantly white, college faculty meeting. All hell might break loose.

The phrase "affirmative action" no longer refers to a specific public policy. Instead, it has become a proxy for the "race issue." Despite data showing that white women have been the primary beneficiaries of affirmative action, the controversy that surrounds it has everything to do with the conflict between white and black Americans. Depending on the context, the mention of affirmative action can spark discussions of black genetic inferiority, black criminals, the breakdown in the delivery of services (both private and public), reverse discrimination, and even reverse racism.

When *Washington Post* reporter Janet Cooke lost her Pulitzer Prize, and her job, after her series of articles about a young black heroin addict was exposed as a fabrication, some argued that the root cause of her unprincipled behavior was affirmative action. According to this argument, Cooke was hired for a job that was beyond her qualifications, and therefore was "pressured" into writing deceitful articles. Qualified *Post* reporters, presumably, were capable of finding stories that were not only sensational but true. The important point here is that Cooke's racial identity became the focus of attention.

Because the term "affirmative action" is rarely taken to refer to a specific policy, defenders of the actual policy are at a disadvantage. I have often been caught in debates on affirmative action that turned out to be no more than pretexts for venting opinions about blacks. On one occasion it dawned on me that my opponent was really commenting on the supposed moral demise of a once-Christian America (affirmative action evidently made people yearn to step outside of their "natural" and God-given status—and thus represented too much of a concern for mammon).

It does not surprise me that many white Americans whose standard of living is declining choose to blame their plight on the "unqualified Negroes" who were unfairly given the jobs that should have gone to them. But I don't know what white Californians will think when they wake up to the same declining paychecks after affirmative action is abolished.

Of course, if every Negro actually received the "affirmative action" jobs attributed to them by disgruntled whites, black America would be prospering. As an advocate of affirmative action, I find myself in a discussion that erroneously assumes that the policy has been conscientiously instituted. While Pete Wilson and others claim that we have gone too far, I'm still waiting for the policy to be applied. I am caught defending a status quo that I believe is quite obscene. But publicly to call affirmative action a cruel hoax—of rhetoric over substance—would only help to those who want to rid this country of even the rhetoric of racial justice.

In some respects, affirmative action attempted to reduce the pariah status of blacks by diffusing them in greater numbers in professional occupations and high-skilled jobs. Supposedly, through seeing blacks in these positions, whites would recognize that blacks are ordinary people. Now certainly this has happened to some extent. Yet it has become increasingly clear that racial marginalization is more resilient than many of us had believed. The increasing presence of blacks throughout the class structure has not changed the status of blacks as outsiders. In fact, I have been shocked by the apparent potency of resurgent racial appeals in this Republican Congress.

All too often, the racial identity of blacks is a focal point for white attention, particularly when a white person has been, or believes he has been, victimized by some bureaucracy. The white scholar who applies for an academic job will most likely accept being passed over if the

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job goes to another white person. But if it goes to a black person, the assumption is easily made that he or she got the job for reasons other than merit.

Take the case of my white Harvard college buddy who graduated Phi Beta Kappa but did not get into Harvard Law School. He was devastated. His explanation was—surprise!—affirmative action. I was angered, torn, perplexed by his response. Though I supported affirmative action, the fact that I could put faces on the individuals concerned (including some black Harvard College peers who were admitted to the law school with lower grade point averages (GPAs) than my friend) only increased my anxiety. I made an appointment with a Harvard Law School admissions dean and spoke to him about the plight of my white buddy. This dean gave me the usual spiel about well-rounded candidates (my buddy was a bookworm) and racial diversity and so forth. Then he mentioned that about 60 percent of the white students admitted to Harvard Law that year had lower GPAs than my friend. "Why," he said, "don't you ask about them?"

The democratic left has to figure out how to address the deeply embedded racism in large sectors of the white American populace. There is a lingering escapist tendency in some white leftists, a tendency to believe that the white working and middle classes that blame affirmative action for their problems are not suffering from racial parochialism. Instead, the argument is made that these are decent whites who are merely upset by their individual confrontations with the unjust procedures of affirmative action. Surely there are such people. And because racism need not dominate one's entire being, many decent people can be found among the ranks of the racist. But the tendency of some within the democratic left to downplay the pervasiveness of racism is morally disappointing and often cowardly.

The United States is a deeply racist country, not only in its enduring historical legacies but in the ordinary, everyday lack of concern that so many white Americans feel for the plight of poor blacks. The utter devastation that takes place on a daily basis in black urban areas could not be tolerated if white Americans viewed blacks as fellow citizens or even as fully equal human beings. Black America lies outside of the scope of white moral empathy—and this is true not only of the black urban poor. For instance, it is common for white suburbanites to try to minimize the black presence in neighboring housing (and this for the black bourgeoisie!). Any serious discussion of affirmative action must be situated within this despairing realization of American racial realities. After all, what makes affirmative action appear so problematic to many whites is that the beneficiaries are imagined as "others." Whites are willing to make sacrifices to benefit "themselves"—that is, other whites. Until white Americans recognize the depth of our racial crisis, our natonal conversation about affirmative action will be evasive and inadequate. □

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION: LEFT PERSPECTIVES

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Lin Chun

TOWARD A CHINESE FEMINISM

A Personal Story

I was born a few years after the founding of the People's Republic of China (1949) in Beijing and grew up an equal of everybody else—judged, at least, by one important criterion, gender equality. My sisters and many friends shared with me their sense of seldom experiencing discrimination for being female in those years, however partial or even, sometimes, false that sense might be.

I have two sisters and no brother. My parents (who are largely self-educated intellectuals among the Communist rank and file) were evidently not unhappy that they did not meet the traditional Chinese ideal of having a son; indeed, they were very proud of each of us. While we were Young Pioneers, whenever we sat at the dining table with them, we used to call our father, the sole man in the family, the "party representative." In one of the most popular movies of the time (later made into a ballet and modern opera as well), based on a true story called "The Red Detachment of Women," the party representative among women soldiers in Hainan in the 1930s was a man, a hero. With the female company commander, he helped to raise class consciousness and to win battles against the White army and the local despotic landlords (both were, so to speak, all male). The theme song of the movie remains today a favorite of mine: "Advance, advance! We bear heavy duties as soldiers; we fight deep injustice as women. . . ."

The fact that the women revolutionaries would have needed a male leader or, to use today's faddish phrase, that there existed a "gender hierarchy" in the Communist forces, did not bother us. What was most fundamental about the revolution seemed so obvious: it was made by and for the exploited and oppressed, including the special underclass of women; if one of its goals was precisely women's liberation, if its moral principles were unity and equal relationships between men and women (and between officers and soldiers, the army and the people, and so on), what else should matter? It was hardly noticed that the first Communist group convened in Shanghai in 1921 formally to set up the party consisted of men only. The general organizational pattern of the Chinese Revolution has ever since been men-a-step-before-women in becoming politically conscious and mobilized, hence promoted. But so what?

Our parents told us very little about their personal stories in relation to the revolution. What impressed me the most from those rare occasions when they talked about themselves turned out to be almost irrelevant. My mother had to cross over a mountain on foot to attend a local school in a southern province where the mountains, she said, were covered with red bayberries throughout the year—this cheered her up from the exhausting daily treks. The picture of a pathway stretched through bayberries was so sweet in my imagination that I completely neglected the bitterness of the conditions of rural education. I did not realize that she, as the only child in her family, was exceptionally lucky among the girls in her home town (probably the poor boys too) to be able to go to school. Later, for some reason, she was taken to Indonesia where my grandmother (who was educated, also

This article is a revised version of the first part of an introductory piece originally written for the author's book manuscript on the transformation of Chinese socialism.

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unusual then) worked, and they settled down to live a relatively comfortable life.

After the war against the Japanese invasion began (1937), my mother could not help wanting to join her compatriots in the national liberation movement. So, at the age of fourteen or fifteen, she managed to leave her beloved mother and, with a friend two years older, to return to China. She never said much about that extraordinary adventure. I did not and still cannot imagine the immense difficulties the two young women must have encountered on that journey, by sea and land, with little money and nothing else but courage and determination, in the turmoil and chaos of war. They finally lost each other at some point in China proper (I remember seeing their joyful meetings after their reunion sometime in the 1950s). Her friend eventually made her way to Yanan, the central base of the Communists, while my mother got involved in resistance activities in the South. She met my father, survived many more hardships including imprisonment and torture, and at long last found herself in the crowds in Tiananmen Square celebrating the birth of the new China in October 1949.

We heard high praise for our mother from those who had known and admired her since her early years. In our eyes she was no doubt an independent and liberated woman. Yet she was also ordinary, along with millions of others—women peasants, workers, and intellectuals—who believed and participated in the revolution. Did they see their specific "female subjectivities" being in any way sacrificed for the universal cause of liberation? Had she and her fellow female participants ever experienced any "systematic" discrimination in the revolutionary camp? Were they aware of any "male dominance" existing within the Communist power structure? Have they, in fact, ever had a pondering moment or sufficient interest to look at their place in relation to men within and without the family during the revolutionary struggles? Was it possible for them to think of "gender identity" not in the normative context of women's liberation but in terms of the defects of the revolution itself?[1] Moreover, how would my father and his male comrades view the matter? Have they ever thought of or been bothered by it?

I do not know how my parents and friends of the older generation would respond to questions like these. (Perhaps they would simply brush them away?) To my regret, I never asked. I could not ask what did not occur to me. And I still cannot ask without explaining why these are, now for me, valid and necessary questions. Only recently I began my own attempt to approach the gulf between the fundamentals of the revolution and its actual theories and politics by thinking about the intrinsically contradictory character of a communist feminism. Yet how could we, Chinese living and thinking and striving for the decent ideals of equality, have missed the kind of questions that since the late 1970s have stimulated notable contributions by Euro-American feminist critics to China scholarship? I am not concerned here with the qualities of their various analyses, but only with the contrast in our perspectives. What prevented us from seeing things in a critical manner comparable to that of our Western feminist counterparts?

I myself was much confined to a personal experience, above all a home environment (and similar environments extended from it), in which the issue of gender appeared not to exist. But how did it come to be so? Was gender difference and equality really not an issue, or were we simply blind to it? Was my father, for example, the center of attention and care because of his chronic illness or would he have been superior anyway? More generally, is it true that family relations in China were so much penetrated by the social power relations of the party-state hierarchy that a distinguishable private sphere did not survive? What is, at bottom, the nature of the Communist family, in which the wife's rank (and hence grade on the wage scale) is usually lower than the husband's? Moreover, how should we evaluate the relationship between the Communist "masters" and their female domestic helpers, notwithstanding varieties of individual cases? Has the celebrated principle of equality—"whatever the division of labor may be, all are servants of the people," ever been a reality? Or is that articulation itself flawed and hypocritical? Unfortunately, these questions were beyond my range of concern until quite recently.

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My own parents had respected, cared for, and helped each other through thick and thin, though they never showed any intimacy in front of us. The worst argument they ever had, as far as I can remember, was over my grandmother, who returned from Indonesia to join us around 1960 (I do not know how and when my mother resumed contact with her). She liked to dress in a silk sari, cook her favorite Nanyang (southern Asian) meals, and make us children luxury snacks such as fried bananas. I say "luxury" because this was during the "three difficult years" following the failed Great Leap Forward (1958-1959), when people were hungry, everything was rationed even in Beijing, even for senior cadres and high intellectuals. My grandmother, as a privileged "returned overseas Chinese," had some extra supplies of foodstuffs as well as money to spend (probably in the black market), and appeared to be unconcerned with the gap between her life and that of others. My father could no longer tolerate this and demanded that she move out of our place (which was in the housing compound of his work unit). He must have been ashamed, as I understood later, of having such an openly "bourgeois" lady in a "proletarian" family, especially if he knew (did he?) how bad the rural famine of the time was. My mother argued, cried, and in the end gave up; she rented a private studio nearby for her mother whom she really wanted to live with after so many years of separation.

Should the result of that month-long, bitter argument affect my view of the equality between my parents—which we all took for granted? (The essence of their relationship is, after all, not for me to judge.) Probably not. For it was not my father, but his principles, which were actually shared by my mother, that won out. I use the word "proletarian" literally to refer to something very characteristic about my own home and the homes of common Communists like us. No wonder Grandma was out of tune with it. Nothing there was private property, for example, including the apartment and the furniture. Everything belonged to "the state," as we said in everyday Chinese. The single non-public piece conspicuously standing in our living room was my father's old grand gramophone, with lots of records (which were all smashed at the beginning of the cultural revolution). He, however anti-bourgeois, was a Western/Russian classical music lover. There were his many precious books, of course, the sole material that could possibly make up "property" of one's own (most of which were also lost during the cultural revolution). As small children, we hardly had a sense of possessing even personal belongings. Money and the notion of "owning" were deemed poisonous, and I was once punished by my father—seriously enough for me to learn the lesson forever—for using two cents to trade with my younger sister. (The enjoyment of public wealth and service by individuals and families to various degrees according to their stratified status in a state-controlled economy and redistributive system needs to be examined separately.)

Beyond the lack both of private property and the sense of privacy, personal and family life itself was "socialized" or "depersonalized" in many "proletarian" families. When we were little, our parents were often absent from home, either away on a working trip or staying in the countryside as members of a work team sent by the central organs during the successive campaigns of economic or political mobilization. Our childhood was spent mostly in a (residential) nursery, a school, or in the care of an "auntie" (nurse). I do not recall whether I ever felt miserable, missing my parents; maybe I did. But I do remember great times with them at dinners, in a park, on a holiday, whenever they were available. They were no doubt among the most loving and responsible parents; but they also, though maybe sometimes reluctantly, trusted public institutions to ensure our well-being.

On the whole, my childhood (and that of my sisters and many friends) was very happy, enriched by what we call "collective life" outside the home. Having followed debates in the West since the 1980s about the overburdened and disrupted motherhood of working women and about related problems such as the financing of day care facilities, I still think of my own experience with appreciation. After all, this kind of family situation was not unusual in the 1950s and early 1960s, which were the heroic and difficult years of a new country striving for survival, dignity,

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and prosperity against long odds.

Then there came the nationwide "socialist education movement" which mainly aimed at the rural cadres, while in the urban centers junior high school students like myself and my elder sister studied Mao's work and engaged in self-criticism. This was the prelude to the now notoriously destructive cultural revolution. (The cultural revolution, however, somewhat like "1968" in the West, in many aspects remains a historical mystery that still needs to be reexamined and understood. I will attempt elsewhere an analysis of the rationality and irrationality of that enormous mass movement, and of the different motives behind it, which reflected the accumulated social conflicts of the previous period. I will also confront the pro-cultural-revolution arguments—advanced even among those who were themselves gravely victimized, yet still engaged in the search for personal and social liberation. The validity of this search and the price paid for it were not fully revealed to me until the huge rehabilitation campaigns following the Mao era. Only then did I meet someone who had lived in a world completely different from my own in its relationship with communism, a world of discrimination, oppression, and independent thinking, and through him I came to know many different life experiences.)

What preoccupied me above all was the peculiar experience of young women in those years. There were confusions, doubts, and pains, but there was also at times a genuine feeling of freedom and self-determination. It was indeed an age more than ever before in China of female participation in politics, management, and all kinds of social and cultural activities; and consequently, so to speak, of empowerment of women within the family as well, especially in the sweepingly "modernized" rural areas. On the other hand, acts of humiliation and violence against men and women on the "wrong" side were committed by people of both sexes at every level—a historical page still too heavy to be turned. I myself, always a favored student, without having sensed the slightest oppression, was nonetheless among a group of four to put up the first rebellious "big character poster" among the juniors in our school (which was all-female). As one of those students who quickly organized themselves to exercise their "right to rebel," I participated enthusiastically in the "mass criticism" of the "revisionist educational line" and of the authorities and teachers whom we deemed to have carried it out. Although I happened not to have physically attacked any person, what I was involved in was no doubt part of that massive and blind process of persecution. In fact, the first wave of severe violence in which more than one principal was beaten to death by students or driven to suicide occurred in the best all-girls schools in Beijing.

When the time came years later to think over these events, I simply wanted to know why, and why teenage girls? Working from a preliminary analysis elsewhere,[2] I want now to stress the hidden crisis of ideology and politics, which would not have revealed itself had there not been such large-scale chaos and casualties. Apparently the often arbitrary boundaries dividing perceptions of good and evil, given systematic manipulation by the authorities and a lack of a legal system, misled the post-revolution generation. And the female part of that generation was also trapped in the gender-laden conflicts between the required "class standing" and their natural human compassion, simultaneously viewed as "feminine" and politically unacceptable. In the end, the anti-humanist spirit of Maoism (and struggles over its interpretation in the wake of the paralysis of the "ideological state apparatus") turned out to be profoundly damaging to the very foundation of Chinese socialism, as ideology and social experiment.

Concerning generational relations, one of the exciting scenes of the cultural revolution involved millions of young people traveling the length and breadth of the country to "propagate and establish revolutionary ties." It is extraordinary, looking back, that parents so easily let their children (self-organized in peer groups) make distant journeys, often without a plan, even without a minimum of packing or definite destinations. (The students, in the absence of teachers who became the targets of attacks or stepped aside, would decide, say, in the morning and depart in the afternoon; rail tickets were not required anyway.) While my sisters and I were each gone with our own schoolmates, our mother was

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pleased to open our home to girls and boys from other provinces, as many Beijing residents did. In two hectic trips, I covered two-thirds of the country, from the north to the south, then from the east to the midwest. My group also went on foot for two hundred miles, on an imitative "long march" to honor the glorious undertaking of the Red Army (1934-1935), from the heart of the Jinggang mountains, where the Communist guerillas created their first base in the late 1920s to Ruijin, the capital of the Chinese Soviet Republic (1931-1934).

That feverish period brought a further loosening and devaluation of family ties because of the intense "class struggle" that ruthlessly divided kin and, for that matter, other identities or communities. This becomes all the more interesting in light of the later revival of family solidarity, which served as a refuge for many people when political tyranny reached its height in 1975-1976. One may certainly ponder here the potentials and limits of the now formative analytical framework of separate public and private spheres when it is applied to China, where for decades politics regulated not only social but also personal life.

After two years of revolutionary activities in which classrooms were empty or only used for "struggle meetings," the three of us left home, quite willingly, for different places in the countryside during the campaign for "being reeducated by the peasants." My younger sister could have stayed with my parents (as policy permitted one child of each family to stay in the cities), but acting on their self-disciplined commitment to allow no room for selfish interests, they sent her away as well to the far north. She was barely fifteen. Later, as targets of criticism, they too went to a "cadre school" in rural Hubei, taking with them both my grandmothers who, however, failed to survive the unexpected emotional and physical difficulties (which they saw as a "great disorder under heaven") and died one after another within a few years. (My grandmother on my father's side had previously lived with my uncle's family in Beijing, and because they now had to move to another "cadre school" in a much more remote province, my parents took over the job of looking after her. I never met either of my grandfathers.)

Though they rarely talked about political ethics, my parents nonetheless taught us, simply by their deeds, what it was right to do. Their voluntary and total identification with what they believed to be a good cause had its historical origin in past experience, from which the revolution gathered its momentum and popular support. This identification survived the accusations against them during periodic "rectification" campaigns. It was gradually undermined only when the wrongs and sorrows within the revolution became so severe and so evident that they realized the necessity of clearing its name through conscious struggles—from inner-party actions to popular uprisings (such as the massive street demonstrations in Beijing and Nanjing in 1976). The goal was once again to find and devote oneself to a genuinely just cause "above" any individual interest.

The question of individuality and personal fulfillment, not to mention "separatist" identity, was, paradoxically, indistinguishable (if not excluded in standard theoretical formulations) from this pursuit of universal interests. Even the most noble and independent attempt at exercising citizenship did not consciously challenge communist degeneration at its root. The feminist thesis that "the personal is political" was no novelty for the Chinese, yet it oriented psychological conflicts far away from what that slogan clearly implies in a different social context. Having said this, I must add that it was not true that people in Communist China were merely obedient, their lives, therefore, lifeless. There were truly creative, emancipatory, and joyful moments in the lives of Chinese women and men, despite big and small tragedies. Nor was the system a monolithic bloc without any gaps, inner breakthroughs, and diversities. What is utterly wrong with Western mainstream liberal criticism of communist totalitarianism is its ignorance of the real complexity of communism (aside from the social achievements of the Communist regimes), which differs from country to country, party to party, period to period, situation to situation, believers to believers, even within the totalitarian territory. My parents, for example, both have strong personalities and remained so throughout the tortu-

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ous years of the "continuing revolution," which gradually lost its massive constituency.

I went to a village in northern Shanxi near the border mountains on which the "Smaller Great Wall" was built to obstruct nomadic tribes several centuries ago. Only by living with the peasants on that poor plateau during our formative years (in my own case, ages sixteen to twenty-one), did the group of us "city youth" develop a critical attitude toward reality. (Before then I did have some natural objections to the increasingly philistine Mao cult and was labeled a "reactionary student" for expressing them, but I never connected the cult to any systematic faults of existing socialism.) For the first time we learned how huge a gulf there was between material—including educational and medical—conditions in the cities and the countryside; how greatly the morale of real laborers, from time to time in hunger and despair, differed from the joyful folks singing of the harvest in familiar picture posters; how lucky we ourselves were compared with the often miserable life of rural women; and how unfair a fate was already prepared for our village friends.[3] On the other hand, since the peasants were hardly integrated into the state welfare establishment, it can be said that they also constituted the most independent (and the largest) portion of the population. Their tenacity, wit and unique perspective helped us to develop an outlook on life that was heavily influenced by egalitarian sentiments—against privilege, urban arrogance, and every form of elitist social bias.

Gaining its primary strength from the countryside, communism, as we began to see it then, ultimately failed the peasantry after seizing state power by subjecting the organization of agriculture to an "internal accumulation" for the sake of industrialization. This, almost a deliberate betrayal, was justified by the claim of necessity and sustained by a rigid system of urban-rural segregation that undermined the moral promise of Chinese socialism.

With a somewhat simplistic conviction of women's liberation through involvement in the labor force, we did promote some changes in local life. By working daily and competing in the fields with young male members of our production teams, and by playing a leadership role in organizing female hands, we set ourselves—inspired by the spirit of the day—to be role models for the young village women. We made every effort in other community activities as well to attract female participation, as part of our propaganda job. Having quite successfully brought women out of the home, however, we overlooked the typical problem of their "double burden." It was a neglect all the more regretable because the underdeveloped socialization of house work and the "feudal" attitude toward such work as gender specific were both especially severe in backward regions.

We also failed with another task: to alter the old custom of selling daughters in return for betrothal gifts. A widespread practice in the rural north, this frequently involved *huanqin* or direct exchanges of (underage) girls between families in order to get a son a wife. The price for a bride was so high that many young men could not afford marriage unless they were prepared to sacrifice their sisters—if they were "lucky" enough to have a sister who had, in turn, no luck to marry out to a town dweller. Under the government's strict residence control, few could ever escape the impoverished countryside. I was hurt, as a devoted women's team leader, not so much by the actual tears as by the passivity and even mindless contentment (over the gifts received, for example, which were made possible by the family's going into debt) on the part of the victims of those strange mercenary marriages. For the first time the "woman question" appeared to me as something of urgent contemporary relevance. It was immediately related to the situation of sheer poverty that overwhelmed men and women and erased even the most extensive and penetrating ideological influence.

Yet the question, which seemed merely rural, was in fact a pervasive one; and it might be approached very differently. Does tradition explain everything—as purely a matter of the "remnants of the old society," having nothing to do with a socialism that, almost by definition, would abolish these remnants in its irresistible forward march? Or maybe socialist policies and institutions are themselves severely limited by a certain cultural backwardness, hence unable to uproot deep forces of human indignity and misfortune? This latter doubt did bother me (as a dim

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passing thought) when I wondered why the official Women's Federation was powerless to confront those illegal acts of human trade[4] and, moreover, why the male-headed household should continue to be the norm, legitimated in a new society that thus rendered the exchange of women naturally acceptable. But without thinking much—that was an age for social change without philosophy or rational understanding of the world—we never fully understood the reality that struck our conscience and challenged our received education.

As privileged urban students "sent down" to learn from the peasants, we did not actually share some of their most fundamental experiences—such as hunger (we had grain subsidies from government reserves), early and undesired marriages, the closed world of a locally bound existence. That must be the reason, I admit, for our having sustained a naive idealism throughout the period, regarding personal feelings and affairs as ultimately unimportant in the great collective struggle. Socialism, often as an abstract ideal, was defended for the sake of socialism. Here the personal turned out to be not really political, except when private desires got in the way of ideological correctness and therefore were seen as politically offensive. So individuals, especially those of my urban generation, were highly politicized in the sense that their self-repressive mechanism worked effectively against "bourgeois" humanism and individualism in general and in support of communist puritanism in particular. Female self-repression was even stronger: strangely featured in a socialist culture, it existed side by side with an ideology of gender equality.

It was not accidental that a Soviet autobiographical novel called *How the Steel was Tempered* (by Nikolay Ostrovsky, English and Chinese trans., Moscow, 1952) about a young Bolshevik and his comrades fighting in the civil war, had a tremendous influence on my entire generation. I still vividly remember every detail of the book, especially how a beloved revolutionary martyr was seen by his widow: falling in battle, dying in her arms on the vast Russian grasslands, his eyes forever gray, the color of steel, not blue, the color of love. Personal emotions and desires, including sexuality, appeared to be incompatible with the lofty, ruthless, and selfless revolution. It was not until much later that I would come to see the lack in our consciousness of two key notions tied to the very idea of liberation: freedom and happiness. We could indeed for a long while feel free and happy as so-called "successors to the cause of proletarian revolution," but not without profound blindness and prejudice, not without an immense feeling of alienation within ourselves. Critical of that past experience as I am now, I nonetheless also miss what I see as some of the most worthy, beautiful, and heroic expressions of "human nature" that are lost in the present age of cynicism, money fetishism, and single-minded pragmatism.

My life in the countryside came to an end when things began to change everywhere, as the country slowly recovered from the disruptions of the revolutionary 1960s. I left my village with mixed feelings of nostalgia and longing, also a sense of guilt for going to the university alone (only with a couple of my fellow city dwellers), leaving friends doomed to stay behind and to remain quasi-illiterate, some of whom were the smartest people I ever knew. Waving farewell to them on that golden autumn day has become for me a permanent reminder of naked inequality and minority privilege sustained by a proud socialist policy. I came to realize (as many others like myself did) that I had grown up physically and mentally not in Beijing where we were spoiled and deceived but in that northern corner of the great loess plateau, even though five years were not very long and we scarcely ever found a moment (or indeed a book—almost all we had were a copy of *Anti-Dühring*, *And Quiet Flows the Don*, and *War and Peace*—apart from *200 Foreign Folk Songs*) to read in those days. Judging from what we gained from living with the peasants, Mao was right to hold the concept of education well beyond the reach of formal schooling.

But what was self-defeating with the Maoist educational revolution also became obvious as the new experiments failed to teach young people to appreciate, as critically as one should, the cultural heritage of human civilization. The em-

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phasis on physical labor and on combining theory with practice did not work in an era when "knowledge" as such was totally unappreciated. In that year (1973) for the first time since the resumption of higher education, a rudimentary entry examination was required. The results of the exam were, however, cancelled later on after an applicant handed in a blank paper and stated in the *People's Daily* that such a bourgeois barrier to (academically unqualified but) politically qualified worker, peasant, and soldier candidates must be "smashed." So it was. Not surprisingly, then, the university students were composed of young (and not very young) people poorly prepared for any advanced study in any scholarly field. Even though in accordance with the principle of equality a great many more of them than ever before were from rural areas and female, they could not be provided with what they actually needed from a good primary and middle school education, despite great efforts by devoted teachers. Moreover, the purpose of attending university was not conceived as learning but simply as "occupying the educational arena" previously controlled by the "bourgeoisie" (a central category never coherently defined in the Chinese political language). Practically it was even simpler—the university became the single transitional place for anyone able to "get out" of the countryside and get on the state payroll, hence once and for all to lift one's status from the agricultural.

Reading was thus something odd, unfashionable, and even regarded as somehow politically incorrect. There was not much time to sit down to read anyway. Half of my three university years was spent on "social practice" in villages and factories, and at least another quarter on political activities. (By the way, sex was strictly prohibited and dating discouraged.) In the history department of the finest provincial university where I went, for example, the world history course (which, believe it or not, covered a time-space span from antiquity to the end of the Second World War over five continents) lasted a total of sixteen class hours in four weeks. There was no natural science taught to humanities majors. Foreign languages were not required. Examinations and the graduation thesis were altogether eliminated. Quite unusually, a group of friends and I still read as much as we could, including "big books" from the Chinese classics to the three volumes of *Capital*, with, of course, great gaps and difficulties in our understanding of them. Although not under pressure of exams or deadlines, we faced suspicion and even hostility from fellow students. (It is interesting to note that later in the 1980s the Chinese, after decades of isolation and ignorance, finally encountered some "new" intellectual trends in the West only to find them familiar. The Foucaultian "knowledge/power" thesis, for example, echoed well the Maoist preoccupation with bourgeois domination in the realm of cultural production; and indeed our university experience was not altogether bizarre if taken as part of the search for reinterpretations and innovations in an all-embracing project of cultural politics.)

I graduated in 1976, an eventful year, a second turning point, after 1949, in modern Chinese history. In April, in the form of mourning the late Premier Zhou Enlai, a popular revolt against the tyrannical regime—now in the hands of a handful of "ultra-left" careerists led by Mao's estranged wife—started in Beijing and spread to other urban centers. This movement, known as the Tiananmen Incident, was the first massive protest in the People's Republic, involving also numerous party members, against the ruling order. In July, in an unprecedented earthquake in Tangshan, an industrial city 80 miles from Beijing, 240,000 people perished overnight. I rushed to Beijing to be with my parents in their temporary shelter, which was in a sea of sheds while buildings were evacuated. My parents and their old comrades already knew, somehow, without accepting the traditional superstition that natural disaster is an omen of social-dynastic alterations, that significant changes would come soon. Mao died in September, and in a few weeks, a coup succeeded in overthrowing the "Gang of Four," an action supported ardently by almost everyone. A magnificent epoch, full of hopes and despair, glories and sorrows, was closed.

Today it seems rather remote, and indeed I am puzzled, to think of my mother as a liberated woman in the revolution and of the gender-blind-

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ness of my own generation growing up under communism. The whole question of women's liberation is all the more pressing because my daughter's generation is now being socialized in an environment in which the old socialist beliefs and policies concerning gender equality, however flawed themselves, are diminished by the overwhelming power of market forces. What has been a very positive development in China in the last decade, however, is the building-up of committed and autonomous movements for women's studies and women's interests. Moreover, these movements have rapidly expanded to make an impact on the entire course of the country's political liberalization and economic reform, primarily through strengthening the moral dimension of public discourse and actual policy formation.

Naturally I identify myself with the women's movements. My personal path leading to a feminist understanding is further related to the long, collective search for a synthesis of socialism and liberation, and hence at the present historical moment, to reform socialism. For me, feminism would inevitably link women's rights with citizens' rights, women's consciousness with democratic consciousness, women's liberation with social emancipation. This is a feminism aimed first and foremost at political democracy and full citizenship, and at self-realization and self-determination in harmony with social achievements. Perhaps a feminism bearing universal demands sounds too broad, but I do not see how it can be otherwise. Also, my own pathway has been shared by many others, and I know that there are many more who would join us even though their personal trajectories might have been very different. □

Notes

[1] Ding Ling was among a very few female Communist intellectuals who did express some criticisms of the sexual politics of Party life in the red bases. Cf. Ding, "Thoughts on March 8" (1942), in Tani E. Barlow, ed. *I Myself Am a Woman: Selected Writings of Ding Ling* (Beacon Press, 1989). The article was publicly criticized in Yanan.

[2] Lin Chun, "Love and hate: learning 'human nature' under Communism," in K. Gavroglu et al., eds. *Science, Politics and Social Practice* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995).

[3] There were of course richer areas and more successful communes, but the majority of the rural population evidently lived under poverty and compulsion in the two decades prior to the reform. Even William Hinton, the most formidable defender of Maoist agricultural socialism, accepted that two-thirds of the communes failed or stagnated by the late 1970s ("Mao, Rural Development, and Two-Line Struggle," *Monthly Review*, No. 9, February 1994).

[4] The Marriage Law, adopted in 1950, outlawed child brides and mercenary and forced marriages, among other practices typical to prerevolutionary Chinese society.

dissent

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Todd Gitlin

THE DEMONIZATION OF POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

If American culture is centrifugal, and things are falling apart, what is the center that is not holding? Presumably, it is some core of principles—individual rights and opportunities—united by the affirmation that America, heartland of the West, is their home.

There is, in the end, no more coherence in the defense of the center than in the assertion of essential difference, but there is a common rhetoric. The center under bombardment by barbarians is "Western liberal values," "civilization," "culture," "reason." The tribute to American greatness joins three themes: the embrace of a canonized American (and Western) history and literature, the opposition to group rights, and the affirmation of free speech. The genius of the attack on "political correctness" in the nineties has been to fuse the three, polarize opinion against them, and thereby seize the initiative.

In the polarized view, the center stands for truth long ago arrived at and agreed upon by reasonable men. The center is a bedrock America, which is a "way of life," a "dream," an avatar of morality. Its history was long ago collectively understood and engraved in granite, where it must remain fixed and available for the reverence of future generations. This history transcends perspectives, particularities, self-interested passions. It affirms that the United States of America is the incarnation of opportunity, transcending gender and race, a guardian of culture, education, and the arts, resplendent in its unmatched human achievement. The mission of cultural institutions is to pass the heritage on, not trade it away for a mess of multicultural pottage.

This tribute affirms that individuals have more than rights. Thanks to this country, Americans have the opportunity to realize their powers according to their merits. The idea that people should ever be rewarded (and others, therefore, punished) according to group characteristics flies in the face of a belief that the market, using objective test scores, already adjudicates merit. Individuals are already free to attain what they were meant to attain, and the heavy hand of the State should not interfere. By the same token, America's sturdy individuals need free speech, now under assault from "thought police" in ever-widening circles of patrol.

In principle, canon, opportunity, and free speech ought to be mutually detachable. It is logically possible, for example, to support a common curriculum that is both Western and non-Western; to support affirmative action in student admissions but disapprove it for faculties or the Supreme Court; and to oppose restrictions on campus speech but encourage students to conduct themselves with decorum. The charge of "political correctness," however, rests on the presumption that there are only two sides. (So does the standard multiculturalist defense.)

The counteroffensive against the redoubts of the academic left began in the fall and winter of 1990-1991. Although the academic curriculum and its jargon are not generally of broad journalistic interest, nor admissions schemes, nor restrictions on student life—sexual conduct codes passed without press attention for de-

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cades—suddenly these were all of burning interest. The editorial pack, ever eager to sniff out trends by sampling each others' noses, went into full panic. Within a few months, waves of moral alarm were rolling from the *New York Times* ("The Rising Hegemony of the Politically Correct: Academia's New Orthodoxy") to *U.S. News and World Report* and *Time*, and, not least, cover stories in *Newsweek* ("Thought Police"), *New York* ("Are You Politically Correct?"), the *New Republic*, and the *Atlantic*, which featured a long excerpt from Dinesh D'Souza's book *Illiberal Education*. "Tenured radicals are trying to turn campuses into authoritarian ministates," read the pull quote in a George Will *Newsweek* column. President George Bush, not normally concerned with campus trends or the fate of free speech, contributed a University of Michigan commencement speech on May 4,1991, deploring "the new intolerance" sweeping the universities and denouncing what he called "the boring politics of division and derision." The maxim that the power of the media is not necessarily to tell us what to think, but the power to tell us what to think *about*, was thunderously confirmed. PC suddenly stood for something other than Personal Computers. A popular phrase was born.

Among the periodicals in the NEXIS database, the term "politically correct" and its variants appeared seven times in 1988, 15 times in 1989, 66 times in 1990, 1,553 times in 1991, 2,672 times in 1992, and 4,643 times in 1993. For that matter, no symposium of left-wing academics, especially in literature, history, or cultural studies, lacked its counterattacks on reactionaries who, we were told, cloaked their own orthodoxy (even racism or sexism) by pretending that the textbooks and universities that once excluded people of color and women had, in that more bucolic time, been protected pastures of freedom—at least until barbarians of the 1960s aimed their mortars and bazookas at the ivy-covered ivory tower. In 1993, television's Comedy Channel began a weekly series, "Politically Incorrect"; Jackie Mason called his one-man Broadway show "Jackie Mason, Politically Incorrect." In 1994, a comic Hollywood version of Wesleyan University, *PCU*, was released, and in 1994-1995, *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories* was on the best-seller list.

Properly speaking, the phrase "politically correct" was recycled: the term had been around since the 1930s. *Correct* was a Stalinist relic. In a milieu where certain texts (the "science" of Marxism-Leninism), a certain nation (the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), and above all a certain man (Stalin) or, for dissenters within the tradition, men (Lenin and Trotsky) were held to have cracked the code of history and to have come into possession of knowledge of how the world was to move forward, *correct* was a certificate. *Correct* transcended *right*. It conveyed historical certitude. The term presumed that an entire self-consistent rational system of thought was at stake. To be *correct* was to be stamped with the prestige of that system and assured of victory. *Per contra,* to be stamped *incorrect* was to be consigned to outer darkness.

Correct and *incorrect* came back into vogue for the New Left of the late 1960s: a sign that smug rigidity, *a priori* dismissiveness, and metaphysical fantasy had entered a movement that had begun in an exploratory temper, eager to find new language for new circumstances. In the 1970s, the term indicated—according to the user's pleasure—either strict adherence to the political line of one's "tendency" or a certain ironic distance. In the twilight of political certitudes and all-encompassing political visions, the term was ready-made for mockery, even self-mockery, as by the Polish émigré ex- and anti-communist philosopher Leszek Kolakowski, who once entitled an essay "My Correct Views about Everything." By the late 1980s, indeed, the term was used mainly tongue in cheek. As Richard Bernstein (but not his headline writer) noted in the *New York Times* article that touched off the 1990-1991 media frenzy, "the term 'politically correct,' with its suggestion of Stalinist orthodoxy, is spoken more with irony than with reverence. . . . the terms ('p.c.' and 'p.c.p.,' or 'politically correct person') are not used in utter seriousness." Yet the stampede was on.

If the key to the art of demagogy is oversimplification, the crusade against PC was a master exhibit. It suited ideologues of the right to brandish the term relentlessly, collapsing affirmative

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action, curriculum revision, and speech regulation codes into a uniform enemy, lumping together nonsensical "Afrocentrism" with serious scholarship, and referring darkly to a "new McCarthyism." The exposés were of uneven merit, but they acquired instant canonical standing. Ideologues drew the line and demanded to know of wafflers, *Which side are you on*?

The campus climate of the time was, of course, not nearly as suffocating as it was made to sound. Especially at elite institutions, it was frequently arbitrary, fatuous, conformist, and wrong-headed, but rarely punitive. PC did not, in fact, haul miscreants up before congressional committees, fire or flunk nonconformists, pillory them in the press, or take their passports away. It did not force economics departments to hire, or retain, Marxists, nor require of business majors that they study labor history. Conformism there was—unpleasant, stifling, inimical to the high ideal of the free pursuit of knowledge. This climate, where it existed, was well worth criticizing, as at all times when students, professors, or anyone else conforms. Conformism, small-mindedness, abuses of power—these are, indeed, common features of American university life.

In 1960, to take a tiny example, a freshman composition instructor at Harvard assigned his students to write an assessment of a C.S. Lewis essay arguing that pain is an instrument of God's will. Considering this notion outlandish, one student wrote a parody. The instructor, a Jesuit, graded it D and warned the student that any more of this sort of thing would get him in serious trouble. The student was barely seventeen, and not inclined to explore just what sort of trouble the man in the collar meant. Later on in the 1960s, students were thrown out of universities for refusing to attend chapel or to enroll in compulsory ROTC. In 1965, the president of the University of Tulsa refused permission to a speaker from Students for a Democratic Society to lecture on campus property against the war. I was the freshman who parodied Lewis, and the student whose talk in Tulsa had to be moved to a coffee-house off-campus. Newspapers did not fill with denunciations of the tyrannical atmosphere of the universities.

PC was a propaganda slogan from the beginning, a compound of facts and distortions meant to strangle curiosity. By flinging about the scarlet letters, the accusers arranged for a melodramatic confrontation: freedom against slavery. Exuding a love of liberty, they were spared the need to be clear, while pooh-poohing any idea to the left of the current center of gravity of the Republican party, and, moreover, appealing (self-righteously!) to the reasonable person's hatred of self-righteousness. The distinguished English professor Wayne Booth wrote in a February 14, 1994 letter to the editor of the *Chicago Tribune*:

> May I suggest that you reprogram your computers? Instead of supplying the PC expressions when thought fails, program them to ring bells and flash the following whenever any of these expressions is typed in: "PHRASE OUTWORN AND MEANINGLESS! CANNOT CONTINUE UNTIL YOU CHOOSE FROM THE FOLLOWING SYNONYM CLOSEST TO THE VIRTUE YOU WANT TO MOCK:
>
> (1) decency; (2) legality; (3) moral or ethical standards;(4) justice, fairness, equality of opportunity; (5) tact, courtesy, concern about hurting people's feelings unnecessarily; (6) generosity; (7) kindness; (8) courage in defending the underdog; (9) anti-bigotry; (10) anti-racism; (11) anti-anti-Semitism; (12) anti-fascism; (13) anti-sexism; (14) refusal to kneel to mammon; (15) sympathetic support for the jobless, the homeless, the impoverished, or the abused; (16) preservation of the environment in which human life might survive; (17) openness to the possibility that certain popular right-wing dogmas just might be erroneous.
>
> PLACE YOUR CURSOR ON THE NUMBER OF THE VIRTUE YOU ARE OPPOSED TO, PRESS THE 'ENTER' KEY AND THEN GIVE YOUR REASONS OR START OVER."

After years of anti-PC blasts and countermobilizations, crusaders might be expected to take some satisfaction that the worst had been averted. But the *enragés* among the conservatives kept maintaining that everything of value remained at risk, that the war was total, the stakes absolute. The sense of extremity rivaled that of left-wing absolutists invoking *the* class struggle in the final battle against exploitation. As partisans of identity politics girded their loins for the combat against white men and their works, so did men of flame and brimstone invoke the war against barbarism. Hilton Kramer, a trenchant

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art critic when he is not *enragé*-in-chief of the right-wing culture monthly the *New Criterion,* warned in 1993 that "the political correctness movement" had achieved "a decisive victory...in the realm of education, culture, and the arts." "For a brief moment around 1990," wrote Roger Kimball, managing editor of this same manual of cultural resistance and author of *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education,* "the 'long march through the institutions' for which sixties radicals agitated seemed to be complete with the more or less total capitulation of most American universities and cultural organizations to the forces of political correctness." Kimball, whose book was one of the first to lend legitimacy to mainstream journalistic exposés of PC, went on to say that "the takeover of the universities and organizations like the Modern Language Association and the American Council of Learned Societies was only the first step."

Pause a moment on these words: *more or less total capitulation; most American universities and cultural organizations; takeover.* It was in 1993 that Kimball published these words, three years after his own book and Dinesh D'Souza's best-seller had sounded their alarms against the PC onslaught. Apparently all opposition was in vain, for according to Kimball, "over the last couple of years political correctness has evolved from a sporadic expression of left-leaning self-righteousness into a dogma of orthodoxy that is widely accepted, and widely enforced, by America's cultural elite." "That was stage one," Kimball added, and as if that were not bad enough, "stage two, the penetration of political correctness into public policy, is now under way." Stage two was inaugurated by the Clinton administration, whose nominations of former University of Wisconsin chancellor Donna Shalala (as Secretary of Health and Human Services) and former University of Pennsylvania president Sheldon Hackney (as director of the National Endowment for the Humanities) apparently outweighed its not-very-PC nominations of the corporate lawyer Zoë Baird for attorney general or loophole sustainer Lloyd Bentsen for Secretary of the Treasury. Kimball concluded by invoking the choice between appeasement and military preparedness, citing Churchill's statement in 1938 "that the British people had before them the choice of shame or war. He feared that they would choose shame—and have war nevertheless. He was right."

So, to the sound of martial music, have the exaggerations charged onward. For all their genuflections toward reason, humanism, and liberality in a disinterested search for truth, Roger Kimball, Dinesh D'Souza, and many of their journalistic derivatives were, at the very least, sloppy and amateurish. D'Souza's flying tour of campus atrocities was especially breathless. His polemical method was to gather incendiary quotes and baste them together. The more arrogant the professor and the more ignorant the student, the more typical D'Souza found their quotes. Since arrogant professors and ignorant students are not (and have never been) in short supply, this was not difficult. D'Souza's account of Stanford University's curriculum reform, for example, was woefully wrongheaded. In 1987-1988 the faculty had considered replacing the required freshman Western Culture course, a proposal declared by Secretary of Education William Bennett to be "a proposal to 'drop the West.'" Like the old requirement, the new one, Culture, Institutions, Values, or CIV, offered students eight alternative choices. In one of the eight, the reading list included *I, Rigoberta Menchú,* by the Guatemalan Indian woman who was shortly to win the Nobel Peace Prize. D'Souza declared arbitrarily that this, one of more than forty assigned texts in the course, was "perhaps the text which best reveals the premises underlying the new Stanford curriculum," and devoted two pages to trashing it. What he devoted no pages to mentioning was that all eight courses assigned the Old and New Testaments, Freud, Marx, Shakespeare, and Aristotle; that seven assigned Augustine, Virginia Woolf, and Rousseau; six, Descartes, Machiavelli, Aquinas, and Plato; five, Euripides, Dante, Luther, Montaigne, and Homer. Nor did D'Souza mention that only about fifty of Stanford's fifteen hundred freshmen were taking the course that inspired his loathing.

One might well want to argue in favor of core curricula—this author would—yet only the ten-

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dentious critic would fail to note that these are relatively rare and recent creations in America. Stanford's hoary Western Civ program, begun in the late 1930s, had been dropped in the late 1960s, only to be reinstated (renamed Western Culture) in the late 1970s. Harvard had only one required course, in composition, when I went there in the early 1960s. (For breadth, students chose, as at Stanford, from among a list of approved courses.) It was not multiculturalism but the shopping mall university, full of electives, ushered in at Harvard in the late nineteenth century, that demoted an earlier generation of classics. One might also argue vociferously—as again this author has—against the instant elevation of popular fiction to classic status or against the propensity to downgrade literature in favor of "cultural studies" of ephemera. But have the barbarians actually seized the ramparts? D'Souza, to bolster his proclamation that universities are "expelling Homer, Aristotle, Shakespeare, and other 'white males' from their required reading list," quoted the chair of the English department at Penn State University to the effect that "Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is taught in more English departments today than all of Shakespeare's plays combined." The literary scholar Gerald Graff, author of a magisterial account of the history of his profession, decided to count

> the texts assigned in Northwestern University's English department from the fall of 1986, when Alice Walker's novel was first assigned in a course, to the spring of 1990. Over this four-year period I located two courses in which *The Color Purple* was taught, while I found eight courses that required at least six plays by Shakespeare and eight that required at least two. Shakespeare's dominance became even more visibly one-sided when I totaled the number of students in these courses. . . . for every reading of Walker there were approximately *eighty-three* readings of Shakespeare.

Graff cited national surveys of university literature syllabi to the same effect. In nineteenth-century American literature, the canon is still dominated by Hawthorne, Thoreau, Melville, and Emerson. In British literature, it is Austen, the Brontës, Dickens, Eliot, Hardy, and Thackeray. Of those works recently added to the American list, the one most frequently assigned was Harriet Beecher Stowe, and she "was listed by only 15 percent of the teachers surveyed."

Nor did D'Souza remind his readers that canons are not engraved in granite; nor that it took a bitter struggle before the above-mentioned "classics" replaced the Greeks and Latins a century ago; nor that one of those notorious white men of today's canon, good gay Walt Whitman, had to elbow aside John Greenleaf Whittier and James Russell Lowell a generation later. One could write a book as long as D'Souza's composed entirely of refutations and qualifications. Like an Afrocentrist who claims that Plato was black but still doesn't get around to thinking about him, D'Souza claims to be on Plato's side but shows himself innocent of the Socratic method. He worships at the shrine of history but doesn't know the facts.

According to the right-wing correctors of left-wing political correctness, it was not bad enough that ill-conceived ideas and an intolerant atmosphere prevailed in certain departments of certain institutions of higher learning or that there was a rash of censorious outbursts on many campuses. The claim had to be made that reason and civilization were being overwhelmed by superannuated tenured radicals and their administrative puppets. It did not slow the exponents of cultural war when Jon Wiener, Louis Menand, Gerald Graff, Russell Jacoby and others exposed and refuted many of the wilder excesses of the anti-PC corpus. Nothing seemed to shake the canonical standing of their claims. The same horror stories circulated, unexamined and unrevised, from one right-wing pundit to another. Let one group of Stanford students chant "Hey, hey, ho, ho, Western Culture's got to go," and the echo reverberated for years.

One reason why the campaign against PC had more legs than a caterpillar is that identity politics and attendant censoriousness were real. Though many on the left were reluctant to admit it in public, many true stories could be compiled to plug the holes in D'Souza's sloppy research. Professor Leonard Jeffries of the City College of New York plugged a lot of holes all by himself. Here was the chair of City College's department of black studies holding his position—

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a position normally held at the pleasure of the administration—for twenty years in a row while teaching that whites are "ice people" and blacks "sun people," and specializing in anti-Semitic smirks. Here was a tenured professor who had never produced any relevant scholarship, but in 1989 was considered a significant enough figure to be appointed as a consultant to an official task force by the New York State Superintendent of Education, where he delivered himself of the view that the dominance of "the European-American monocultural perspective" explained why "large numbers of children of non-European descent are not doing as well as expected."

It might be noted that Jeffries did not attract many students—his black studies program attracted all of "about half a dozen" majors on a campus of 12,000 undergraduates. But beyond Jeffries, in any event, there was no shortage of material to warrant censure of the censorious American university. Richard Bernstein of the *New York Times*, a far better reporter than D'Souza, compiled many serious cases in his 1994 book *Dictatorship of Virtue*—cases that in their prosecutorial absurdity indeed deserved to become canonical: among others, the University of Pennsylvania bringing charges of racism against a student for yelling "water buffalo," a translation of a Hebrew swearword, at some noisy black students. Bernstein's rhetoric was extravagant: he took his title from the French Revolution, opened with an epigraph from Robespierre, and peppered his text with references to Stalinism and the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Still, he had a lot of goods, and by now, almost no one denies it. The question is what to make of them.

By 1994, independent-minded opponents of the trendily "correct" were acknowledging that the alarm had been excessive. The prolific critic Robert Alter, himself an adversary of fashionable literary theory, wrote that although illiberalism does "constitute a real threat to the variety and freedom and complex pleasures of intellectual life on the campuses, . . . my guess is that its scope and gravity have been exaggerated by most conservative reactions and in the popular media." Even the anti-PC National Association of Scholars was divided, with some convinced that the left-PC-feminist-multiculturalist "monolith" (Kramer's word) had swept all reason and culture before it, others that the worst dogmatism associated with "political correctness" had been fought to a stand-off.

In the meantime, long overdue, a range of neither-nor positions was emerging. The independent left critic Morris Dickstein spoke of "a resurgence of liberal thought, rejecting both intimidation of the left and the hysteria of traditionalists," and ticked off, as exponents, John Searle, Frederick Crews, Irving Howe, C. Vann Woodward, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., David Bromwich, Robert Hughes, John Higham, and this writer. Eventually, a higher order of debate, with clarifying potential, emerged in anthologies edited by Paul Berman, Patricia Aufderheide, and Michael Bérubé and Cary Nelson and in articles by Barbara Epstein, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and David Hollinger—no fault of theirs that many of their judicious writings appeared in small-circulation academic journals. In 1994, the range of neither-nors was extended by Russell Jacoby's *Dogmatic Wisdom,* which chastised the right for a prosecutorial zeal that stopped short of rising in righteous indignation against the dramatic threat to higher education from economic impoverishment; and by Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge, feminists who offered in *Professing Feminism* a devastating and knowledgeable critique of women's studies programs.

But in no apparent relation to the actual strength of the wounded *bête noire,* much of the right continued to emit a high pitch of horror and fervor. How shall we understand this inconsolable fervor, and its success in setting the terms of the debate?

The Selectivity of Media Obsessions

The alarmism of Roger Kimball, Hilton Kramer, and Irving Kristol makes an easy target. But the brandishing of counterevidence does not necessarily clarify. The question is not simply whether the panic was misguided but why it mounted so quickly throughout the media.

Any assessment of the PC panic must start with two general observations. First, media panics are imperfect guides to the truth. Second, some things are true even if Dinesh D'Souza says

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them. The alarmists offered an interpretation for a widespread feeling, but did not invent the feeling. One explanation for the chorus of condemnation is that many would-be thought police officers *were* at work (though usually without the power to crack heads). But truth is neither necessary nor sufficient for a media crusade. This is only rarely because journalists are indifferent to truth. Sometimes truth is difficult to establish, in particular when government propaganda goes to work. Certain obsessions begin with half- or quarter-truths and inflate them—the "missing children" campaign of the mid-1980s, which in full hysteria, down to its milk-carton portraits and President Reagan's claim that there were "well over a million children who disappear every year," neglected to note that, according to FBI statistics, of the thirty thousand American children missing in mid-1985, the grand total abducted by strangers was exactly sixty-seven, while about fifteen hundred had been snatched by a parent in a custody dispute, and the remainder, the vast majority, were runaways in flight from domestic abuse. Some crusades start with almost no truth—for example, the "Africanized killer bees" periodically making their way northward over the Texas border to plunge America into a public health crisis. While maladies like chronic fatigue syndrome and Lyme disease balloon overnight into cover stories, other facts and dangers take years to rise to the threshold of media awareness—AIDS, for example, or breast cancer, or lately, prostate cancer.

Regardless of justifications, all media alarms share certain elements. Part of the explanation for the PC obsession is that there was, in conventional journalistic terms, "a good story." There were actual facts. There were the delights of combat and exposé, with public values at stake. Journalists like conflict for the same reason dramatists and sports fans do. In PC, journalists and editors, who don't ordinarily scrutinize topics for their deeper significance, found the elements of a juicy continuing story: good guys and bad guys, an aura of menace, a promise of moral melodrama, an ever-replenishable source of follow-up stories. Then too, once they have found their scandals, journalists like them simple. Comparisons end up in sidebars, if anywhere, but not in the headlines or the lead in the evening news. The news comes down with a clang of absolute factuality: THIS HAPPENED. Perspective comes trailing afterward, if at all. The easiest thing to do is to graft the latest round of facts or claims onto the previous round, and leave it at that.

Consider the controversy over race-based admissions at Berkeley, one of D'Souza's case studies. The charge was that affirmative action was excluding thousands of worthy white and Asian candidates. Scarcely any students, or faculty, for that matter, understood the administration's actual policy. For its part, the administration did a poor job explaining itself—as if it scarcely understood its own policy. Not surprisingly, journalists, too, were frequently content to remain ignorant. One of D'Souza's points was that many blacks and Hispanics were being admitted to Berkeley with grade-point averages lower than whites and Asians—many of whom were being turned away with 4.0 averages. But hardly any protesters understood that there were so many California high school graduates with 4.0 grade point averages (more than 5,800 out of the 21,300 who applied to Berkeley) that, even were there no affirmative action at all, in 1989, 2,300 4.0s would have had to be turned away. (With affirmative action, the number actually turned away was about 2,800.) Hardly any understood that in a most Californian euphemism, high school students got bonus grade-point credit for doing well in college preparatory courses, so that a 4.0 average did not mean that a student had gotten straight A's. Hardly any students or faculty, let alone journalists, knew that alumni "legacies," athletic, and special-skill admissions accounted for more exceptions to the "objective standards only" norm than affirmative action, so that in 1989, 24 percent of *white* students were admitted to Berkeley on criteria other than academic scores—still a much lower percentage than in the case of blacks and Hispanics, but not negligible either. Nor was it a staple of PC exposés that at Harvard, as late as 1988, preferences for children of alumni accounted for more admissions than all the African-American, Mexican-American, Native-American, and Puerto-Rican registrants combined. Alum-

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ni preferences were a tradition; affirmative action was news.

PC was a good story—but the world is brimming with potential subjects for media frenzy. The savings and loan banking scandal, replete with bad guys and consequences amounting to more than $150 billion, took years to get into the spotlight. (The details were many and hard to grasp. Because Republicans and Democrats shared the trough and the blame, the scandal lacked the drama of partisan confrontation.) Gay-bashing is not a crime that catches much attention in a nation that ostensibly quivers with the fear of crime. One need not be a conspiracy buff to conclude that media institutions are selective.

Melodramatic, continuous conflict helps make the story. This is one reason why Stanford proved enthralling to media in 1988, when the Western civilization curriculum was revamped into a multicultural substitute, and not ten years earlier, when Western Civ was instated in the first place. All the better when a party to the conflict or a victim of the crime carries prestige—Stanford or the Ivy League universities are newsworthy, just as the notorious rape of the Central Park jogger, a white investment banker, in 1989 received hundreds of times more attention than all the other brutal rapes committed around New York City that year put together. On principle and on professional grounds, the press is prone to stand up against violations of freedom of speech—thus, campus speech codes made a compelling target for exposés. Furthermore, to break out, a story has to catch the fancy of editors, which is most likely to happen where national media have flung their news net—at Columbia or Stanford, not San Diego State or Texas A & M. Of course, once the story is certified at a high journalistic level—a *New York Times* story being the most important certificate of significance—the momentum can grow. It helps when experts stand at the ready for consultation. (Recall Roger Kimball, quoted in Richard Bernstein's original PC story in the *Times*.) Then subsequent incidents are ripe to be recognized as part of a pattern. An individual story makes most sense when it rhymes with an established story; when it comes with its own pre-affixed label, and can be recognized as a chapter in an ongoing plot.

Of course, editors based in the northeast will say that their audience will be more interested in Columbia than in Texas A&M, and they are probably right. But what they do not say, what perhaps doesn't rise to consciousness, is that they feel the travails of Stanford and Harvard and Duke in a distinctive way. Disproportionately, they are alumni of these schools. They read their alma mater's in-house magazines and keep in touch with gossip. Indeed, they may have a more intimate stake. It happens, for example, that *Newsweek*'s editor-in-chief, Maynard Parker, the man responsible for putting the 1990 "Thought Police" story on the magazine's cover, became a member of the Board of Directors of Stanford's Alumni Association the following year. Arguably, his attachment to the university was not decisive in Parker's thinking, which was little if any different from that of other editors, but was not irrelevant either, for such a link to university power bespeaks an established view of the world and a special disposition to worry about PC tendencies at elite universities. Other top *Newsweek* editors, though not all, agreed that "Thought Police" would make a smashing cover for newsstand sales, which, although only a small percentage of total circulation, impress advertisers, and mark how well the magazine is doing against the competition.

Beyond personal connections and the pleasures of reporting properly located combat, journalists leaped into the PC story because, like it or not, they are *engagé*—though not usually in the deliberate ideological way charged by many media critics. One need not be a radical relativist to note that, like all social groups, journalists have a social position to defend. Their institutions require that they make objectivity claims. The belief that a true picture of the world is possible is their occupational raison d'être. Therefore, whatever mixture of superior and inferior feelings they harbor toward universities, journalists have a stake in the legitimacy of the sorts of activities that go on there. To the degree that the university loses face or devalues the disinterested pursuit of knowledge, their own credentials are devalued.

It is also both compelling and handy to defend the ideal of objectivity against its degradation by obscurantist professors who clot their

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writing with jargon and, with great flourishes, trumpet impenetrable translations of dubious French phrases. The journalists get to defend the ideal of transparent prose coupled to the ideal of objective standards. In the populist mood, all the educated classes are under suspicion together for "elitism." When they defend the ideal of objectivity—and yes, "Western Culture"—they defend some Platonic idea of themselves.

The Right Turn

But how, in particular, did the PC recoil begin? Media panics frequently start with, or get a boost from, the preoccupations of powerful groups who talk up certain social problems so vociferously, in the right journals, at the right resorts and the right dinner parties, as to land them on the journalistic agenda. In the case of the anti-PC panic, journalistic fascination got a boost from the well-heeled right wing.

Respectable experts, as I have mentioned, help certify the legitimacy of a story. A "report" from a think-tank, or a quotable figure with a book to his or her credit, probably doesn't send a reporter running to write a story, but does help recommend it to an editor or a producer, does move the story along. The prominent expert partisans who certified that PC was a menace—Allan Bloom, Roger Kimball, and Dinesh D'Souza in particular—were supported by the John M. Olin Foundation. It did not hurt their cause that many in the media were receptive to certain complaints from the right.

This receptivity predictably belonged to the recoil against the movements of the 1960s. How could the breakdown of authority in the 1960s fail to generate a counter-movement, a conservative consolidation? With dialectical elegance, a new radicalism aroused a new conservatism. Only then could Political Correctness become a usable demonology in the eyes of politicians and the press. To begin with, the potential for a protracted crusade against the wrong ideas has always been latent in America. The *locus classicus* of right-wing laments about the subversive university was the 1951 book that put William F. Buckley, Jr., on the national map, *God and Man at Yale.* The lament was reinvigorated during the Nixon years, in a popular reaction against militant student movements, a reaction that this time had large-scale academic support.

The political right, reflecting upon its loss of control in American culture, reasonably enough determined that the universities and the media ought to be singled out for counteraction. The business class agreed. Leaders of major corporations thought that only ideological bias could explain the disrepute in which business was held. "Destructive," "misinformed," "slanted," "anti-establishment," determined to "tear . . . down our system": these are among the terms hurled at the media, intellectuals, and universities by prominent executives of multinational corporations during 1974 -1975. Neoconservatives supplied the theory, identifying the media and the universities as nests of a knowledge class that had no stake in business (or national) success and whose naysaying was subsidized outside the market. In 1978, in the view of former Secretary of the Treasury (under Presidents Nixon and Ford) William E. Simon, "What is happening in this country is a fundamental assault on America's culture and its historic identity." Explaining why he had assumed the presidency of the John M. Olin Foundation in 1976, Simon declared that business was obliged to put its money where its interests were. He called for "nothing less than a massive and unprecedented mobilization of the moral, intellectual and financial resources which reside in those . . . who are concerned that our traditional free enterprise system, which offers the greatest scope for the exercise of our freedom, is in dire and perhaps ultimate peril." This "crusade" would mobilize "those who see a successful United States as the real 'last best hope of mankind.'" Simon concluded with three points:

> 1. Funds generated by business...must rush by multimillions to the aid of liberty . . . [and] funnel desperately needed funds to scholars, social scientists, writers and journalists who understand the relationship between political and economic liberty...[and whose work would] dissent from a dominant socialist-statist-collectivist orthodoxy which prevails in much of the media, in most of our large universities, among many of our politicians and, tragically, among not a few of our top business executives. . . .
> 2. Business must cease the mindless subsidizing of colleges and universities whose departments of eco-

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nomics, government, politics and history are hostile to capitalism and whose faculties will not hire scholars whose views are otherwise. . .

3. Finally, business money must flow away from the media which serve as megaphones for anticapitalist opinion and to media which are either profreedom or, if not necessarily "pro-business," at least professionally capable of a fair and accurate treatment of procapitalist ideas, values and arguments.

Thundering that "the only thing that can save the Republican party . . . is a counterintelligensia," Simon was no lone crusader. He was one of the more forthright and better-placed of the right-wing publicists who through passion, organization, and not least, money, helped undermine the liberal-labor welfare state consensus. A paleoconservative free enterpriser, Simon and his co-believers welded a common front with ex-leftist neoconservatives like Irving Kristol, Norman Podhoretz, and Midge Decter. In 1978, Simon and Kristol founded the Institute for Educational Affairs (in 1990 renamed the Madison Center for Educational Affairs), which proceeded to fund some sixty right-wing and sometimes scurrilous campus papers, one of them the *Dartmouth Review*, where Dinesh D'Souza cut his journalistic eyeteeth.

Struggle language like Simon's anticipated the rightward shift in the media—and nudged it on. Corporate funding from AT&T legitimized public television's *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour,* featuring policy talk that rarely departed from the assumptions of Washington think tanks. Right-wing foundations helped launch ideological autos-da-fé like *The McLaughlin Group* onto the airwaves. Partly as a result of the prestige bought by canny investment, the intellectual atmosphere changed. *Commentary* was now read widely in Washington, as was the Sun Myung Moon-sponsored *Washington Times* and its magazine supplement, *Insight*. The American Enterprise Institute, the Heritage Foundation, and more specialized right-wing think tanks churned out op-ed pieces and briefing papers, which reporters felt obliged to pore over. George Will became ubiquitous in magazines, newspapers, and television. Ted Turner gave Patrick Buchanan a daily slot on CNN's show, "Crossfire." When Ronald Reagan came to office, he was known to read—or at least consult—the right-wing *Human Events* and *Conservative Digest,* and if these were still considered slightly kooky tastes, they were so only by comparison with instantly more respectable journals on the right.

And then, of course, Reagan's election certified that the right was not to be considered marginal. Its ship had come in. Reagan had the charm and ideological wherewithal to widen his political base beyond "movement conservatives," while his 51 percent of the vote looked like a landslide against Jimmy Carter's 41 percent.

The urgency of the culture war against the barbarians progressed by fits and starts during the Reagan years. William Bennett banged bully pulpits in Washington at the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Department of Education. It was Bennett who, in 1988, converted the revamping of the freshman year humanities requirement at Stanford University into a national cause celebre, declaring that "for a moment, a great university was brought low by the very forces which modern universities came into being to oppose—ignorance, irrationality and intimidation." It was during these late months of the Reagan administration that the National Association of Scholars was founded to fight left-wing academics, and a turgid, quirky, demanding, obscure and frequently obscurantist book by a political theorist named Allan Bloom soared onto the bestseller list with a blanket assault on student activism, relativism, German philosophy, and rock 'n' roll.

Where Bloom was ornery and idiosyncratic, lesser conservative intellects set out to break down his assault into a set of distinct issues in higher education, and then to clump those issues into an indivisible amalgam called Political Correctness. This campaign came during the damp, declining presidency of George Bush, when the right wing, distrustful of Bush, feeling that (whatever his protestations) he was not quite *their* man, were in need of a focus of evil to concentrate their minds and their resources. The change in political climate from Reagan's years to Bush's helps account for the timing of the PC panic.

Bush began his regime in an ideological disarray brought about by a collapse of enemies. He no longer had the cold war as a magnetic force to line up supporters into a solid front.

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Within his first year in office, the right's intellectual rnap dissolved. What were conservatives going to do without barbarians? They looked homeward, and found new barbarians among the superannuated old barbarians, for it was not lost on them that what they labeled the PC forces had roots in the 1960s left —the very amalgam of minorities that had triggered the "silent majority" reaction in the first place, helping resurrect the Republicans and converting them into a majority party under Richard Nixon. Even the victorious long march of the right through the institutions of politics had failed to roll back the feminist, gay, and multicultural movements that had indeed acquired niches in the institutions of image and word. Conservatives observed that, having taken the White House, they still had not taken back Harvard, Hollywood, the Modern Language Association, or the National Endowment for the Arts. Just after the Gulf War, George Will could write with a straight face that Bennett's successor at the National Endowment for the Humanities, Lynne Cheney, "secretary of domestic defense," faced enemies who were more dangerous in the long run than her husband Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney's adversaries abroad.

The media panic was encouraged by another background factor—the weakening of the universities. Universities made journalistic targets partly because they were already losing public respect. Declining in wealth, universities also declined in prestige. There were scandals—misappropriations of government funds and episodes of sexual harassment—and although there might have been just as many academic scandals left unexposed during the preceding decades, journalists were now primed for the hunt.

The sense that the university was vulnerable was driven by the dominant ideology of the Reagan years and accelerated during the waning of the cold war. For decades after the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the world's first satellite, in 1957, and the Eisenhower administration sounded the alarm and began pouring government money into education, scholarship had been justified as a contribution to national defense.

Fellowships that the federal government would never have dreamed of justifying in the name of knowledge were now justified by their contribution to National Defense—thus the enactment in 1958 of the National Defense Education Act, one of the major sources of stipends for a generation of graduate students. But by the time of Reagan's presidency, the shine was off federal spending. Reagan's cuts in university funding, in fact, predated the end of the cold war. Between 1981 and 1986 federal funding for higher education plunged by 14 percent in real dollars. Moreover, during the Reagan and Bush years, the federal government shifted the burden for public programs to the states. State budget cuts, worsened by recession, were disproportionately leveled at higher education. In Illinois, for example, university spending fell from 23.5 percent of state funds in 1968 to 18.3 percent in 1990; in Colorado, from 23.5 percent in 1982 to 19.2 percent in 1992. Between 1980 and 1989, spending for higher education at all levels of government plunged by 24.3 percent in constant dollars.

At the same time, an aging population of taxpayers was losing sympathy for public schools. The elderly were not only growing as a percentage of the population, but made up an even larger proportion of the voters. The elderly were increasingly willing to dispense with public funds for schools that they thought inessential or worse. Let the young take care of themselves!

Inside the academy, scarcity inflamed faculty turf fights and fueled the intensity of PC and anti-PC crusades. Student fees increased dramatically. So did student debt. In the early 1990s, about half of enrolled students held jobs while attending classes. Students wondered whether, on graduation, they would be able to live in a house half the size of the one they grew up in. The dominant tone was anxiety. Identity politics was one way to crystallize this anxiety and shape it into a worldview. For many a white male (and not only him), the most attractive receptacle was the conservative counterforce. Conservatives apparently cared more for his freedom than liberals who, in the name of diversity, counseled discretion that he could easily mistake for self-censorship. He grew less likely to care about racist, sexist, or homophobic harassment, and cared more about being the victim of stereotyp-

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ing himself. If he had started out with a tolerant disposition, he was dismayed to find that integration had become the goal that dared not speak its outdated name (except, curiously, in parts of the Deep South). He was caught between his individualism, which wanted to be color-blind, and his social liberalism, which acknowledged a history of racial oppression. If he was not conflicted, he got the idea that everyone else got to speak bitterness but himself. If he was aggressive or self-pitying enough, he would complain anyway.

Feeling chilled in the 1990s, he was not interested in being reminded that he was warm compared, say, to his parents. If he came from the working or middle classes, he resented the imputation that his life was a breeze and that he was not deserving. If he had friends of color in high school, he resented their receiving fellowships to which he was not entitled. If women, or blacks, or gays had their afflictions, well, then, in a world of interest groups, he felt that he had his, too. If the world was divided up by identity cards, he, too, would learn to define his discomfort as a stigma, identify with it, wear it with pride. His card would say that he believed in color-blindness, individual rights, freedom from responsibility for the sins of his (or anyone else's) ancestors. He was ready to have conservatives name his malaise: victim of PC. □

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Chantal Mouffe

THE END OF POLITICS AND THE RISE OF THE RADICAL RIGHT

In many European countries, far-right political parties have made important gains. During the past year, elections in France, Belgium, Austria, and Italy have shown the extreme right consolidating its grip and steadily attracting new voters. If we add to this the increasing discredit of the traditional political class under the impact of repeated cases of corruption, the picture does not look good for democratic politics.

But many people dismiss these warnings; they take for granted the stability of democratic institutions; they scorn the "alarmists" who make comparisons with the situation in the 1930s. In their view, there is nothing to worry about. The globalization of the economy and the revolution in communications have established, they say, the conditions for the universalization of the Western liberal democratic model. We are on the verge of another great advance, both technological and political; democracy's triumph in the next century can be guaranteed. It will even be a better type of democracy, one of "dialogue" rather than confrontation.

According to this perspective, the cycle of confrontational politics dominant in the West since the French Revolution has come to an end. The left-right distinction is now irrelevant since it was anchored in a social bipolarity that has ceased to exist. Today, the majority of people in advanced industrial societies belong to the middle classes; the only exceptions are a small elite of very rich, on one side, and those who are "excluded," on the other. This new social structure has made possible the creation of a broad consensus and established the conditions for a "deliberative democracy" in which different groups, instead of fighting to impose their interests, will participate in a free and unconstrained public discussion about all matters of common concern.

The End of Politics?

This approach is nicely exemplified by Martin Jacques, one of the founders of *Demos*, a new British think tank, and previously editor of *Marxism Today,* who celebrates the "end of politics." Politics, he wrote in a programmatic article in the *Sunday Times* (July 18, 1993), has lost its collective dimension and its polarized nature. It now takes place in thousands of groups in civil society and is focused on a variety of issues related to the individual. Conventional parties and politicians have failed to adapt to the changes in society and have become irrelevant to people's identities and priorities. While society has discarded hierarchy, certainty, and homogeneity to become a "hypermarket society," driven by individualism and egalitarianism, they have not been following suit. Deprived of its organizing principle by the decline of the working class, left politics especially has lost its bearings. It has been unable to make the necessary adjustments, and the whole dynamic of the political system has been thrown into disarray. The dramatic decline in the role of the state has been accompanied by an erosion in the power and importance of all political parties. The result is the growing incapacity to address the real issues of society. Hence the disaffection of the public and its distrust of politicians.

Jacques urges us, however, not to envisage such a transformation in a negative way. He argues that the political system should adapt to the

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new "pick-and-choose society" by playing a less important role. A similar vision of a "post-political" era is found in France in many quarters, some of them influenced by a philosophical tendency that praises "postmodern individualism." Those "new democratic individualists" (like Gilles Lipovetsky) see the current retreat from public concerns and the increasing priority accorded to private goals as positive effects of the pluralist ethos. The blurring of the line between left and right is a step toward a more mature society. It indicates a deepening of the democratic process, and it should not be resisted but celebrated. Here too, empowerment of the myriad of self-organized groups that constitute civil society is seen as the answer to the growing inability of political institutions to deal with contemporary complexity.

Whatever their differences, these diverse perspectives share the assumption that the disappearance of class identities and the end of the bipolar system of confrontation have rendered conventional politics obsolete. Consensus finally reigns with respect to the basic institutions of liberal society, and the lack of any legitimate alternative to the present order means that it will not be challenged. Liberal democratic capitalism has imposed itself as the only rational solution to the problem of organizing modern societies; its legitimacy can only be put into question by "unreasonable" elements.

To be sure, everything is far from perfect in this liberal world, and there is much soul-searching about the phenomenon of "exclusion" affecting the homeless, the unemployed, and the very poor. But the fact that increasing sectors of the population are becoming permanently unemployed is perceived more as a problem to be solved than as an indication that something is basically flawed in the political consensus. Since there is no alternative to the dominant economic model, this problem is best tackled without reference to outdated ideologies.

Such a "consensus" approach is, in my view, profoundly inadequate, and its likely consequences very dangerous. This bland consensus at the center has created a political vacuum that has facilitated the growth of the extreme right. The current disaffection with politics and political parties is undeniable, and so to a certain extent is the blurring of the left/right distinction. But there is no reason to believe that this is an irreversible process and still less that it is something to be celebrated. The main problem of European politics resides in the incapacity of the established political forces to provide an adequate vocabulary for the new antagonisms that have emerged in the last decades. Instead of concluding that party politics has become irrelevant, we must redraw the lines of a confrontational politics in a way that will bring a new vitality to democracy.

France and the "Republic of the Center"

The case of France illustrates my argument. Since 1946—but, of course, it goes back much further—French political life had been strongly polarized between antagonistic forces. The importance of the Catholic church on one side and of the Communist party on the other created a clear dividing line between left and right. There were really two "peoples," opposing each other without any space for compromise, let alone consensus. This situation progressively eroded due to the loss of influence of both the church and the Communists, and the political panorama was profoundly transformed after the Socialist party (PS) came to power in 1981. When, after a brief attempt to implement radical policies, the Socialists decided to limit themselves to measures aimed a making capitalism more humane, the "Jacobin" model of politics was officially buried. Since then a politics of the center has been implemented, and among both conservative and socialist elites, there is a broad consensus about economic strategy. The accepted wisdom is that in the context of European integration, there is no alternative to a monetary policy of *franc fort* and that the defense of a strong currency must take precedence over the problem of unemployment.

Several political analysts see those transformations as a confirmation of the "end of politics" thesis. They present the French situation as the consequence of the decline of the working class and the emergence of a vast middle class. A new type of middle-class voter, for whom ide-

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ology has become irrelevant, has been created through the homogenizing influence of the media. She or he has no stable allegiances and does not identify with any party. She or he acts in the political arena as a consumer in a shopping center, trying different products, picking one or the other according to changing moods. Such volatile behavior explains the swings in electoral results that France has recently witnessed.

The writers who put forward these views affirm that today the main cleavages are not social but cultural. In this new situation, the old left-right rhetoric constitutes an obstacle to the modernization of the political system and the creation of a new form of democratic politics.

However, this prevalent interpretation is now being challenged. In a recent article in *Le Débat* (No. 83, January-February 1995) Emmanuel Todd argues that, far from having disappeared, the polarization of the social structure between people and elites still provides the key to understanding French politics. According to Todd, the vision of a society of the center without ideology, whose main social problem is exclusion, does not correspond to the facts. To be sure, there has been a decline in the number of traditional workers, and nobody believes any more in the privileged role of the proletariat. But this does not mean that the working class does not exist or that the idea of the "people" has become obsolete. If one takes into account what he calls the "anthropological" dimension of the social structure, that is, the large number of marriages between blue-collar workers and low-level white-collar workers, one must acknowledge the existence of a "popular" class, distinct from the middle class and not "excluded." Such a class does not possess a collective consciousness, but its conditions of existence are very similar. Its members certainly do not feel part of the "center." Todd claims that this group represents 50 percent to 55 percent of the population and that its behavior explains the instability in French politics in the last two decades. After having made possible Mitterrand's victory in 1981, its members became disillusioned with the Socialists; and today they constitute a sector without adequate political representation.

In Todd's view, it has now become necessary to distinguish between the "political left" usually identified with the PS—despite the fact that it basically represents the interests of the middle classes—and the "sociological left" defined by the popular classes. The central problem for French politics is to find a political outlet for this sociological left whose anti-elitist and anticonsensus behavior could be channeled in unexpected directions.

A Crisis of Representation

In my view, recent elections in France, in May for the presidency and in June at the local level, though they did not confirm all of Todd's predictions, argue in favor of his analysis. To begin with, the second ballot between Lionel Jospin and Jacques Chirac was a straight left-right confrontation, which clearly indicates that such a division is still a significant ground for political allegiance. Despite Chirac's attempt—following a strategy inspired by Todd—to rally the popular classes, his gains among traditional left-wing voters were limited. On the other side, the strong showing in the first round of the presidential elections by "anti-establishment" parties of both right and left (their added votes amounted to 37 percent) are a sign of growing disaffection from the traditional parties. It is clear that an increasing number of people feel that their concerns are not taken into account by the PS and the center right. This has to do mainly with a deficit of representation and not with new patterns of voting behavior.

Examined from the point of view of the rise of the radical right, the elections are particularly revealing. The 15 percent vote for Jean-Marie le Pen in the May elections, the strength of the candidates in the local elections and, more important perhaps, the fact that this vote came from a predominantly popular and young electorate is an indication that the National Front is managing to win over a sector of the population whose demands have been ignored by the "consensus of the center." To be sure, the language in which these demands are articulated is xenophobic and unacceptable in a pluralist democracy. But, given the lack of an alternative discourse, there is a real danger that it will be seen by many people as the only language in which their problems can be expressed.

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It seems legitimate therefore to affirm that France is witnessing a crisis of representation in which many popular demands cannot find channels of expression within the traditional political system. What is really at stake in this crisis is the globalization of the economy and its impact on the popular sectors. To believe that the main contemporary problem concerns those who are excluded from the productive process is to overlook the situation of employed workers whose working conditions are extremely difficult today, who suffer directly from the profound transformations of the world economy. Aware of the precariousness of their employment, they are hostile to European integration and to the generalization of free trade. These are people who voted against the Maastricht Treaty in 1993. Since their demands are perceived as backward and nationalistic, they receive little echo among the main parties. Hence they are susceptible to a politics that offers simplistic solutions. If the "nationalism of exclusion" advocated by Le Pen is the only ideology in which they can recognize their concerns, it is likely that they will increasingly give their allegiance to the National Front. By assuming that this resistance to (what they see as) a necessary phase of modernization is temporary and ultimately retrograde, the main parties are making a dangerous bet.

Since its creation in 1972, the National Front has progressed steadily and it is now firmly established in the French political system. To go on pretending that it only represents a volatile protest vote without any serious basis is incredibly shortsighted. Moreover, this is not a politics that can be stopped through juridical condemnation or moral denunciation. Without coming to terms with the roots of popular antagonism, no one will be able to reverse the trend.

Similar tendencies exist in several European countries where the development of an exclusionist nationalism is also linked to the economic transformations that have dislocated the established way of life of many groups and created a profound crisis of identity. In all these cases, it is important to realize that one of the reasons for the growth of the radical right is the lack of political representation given by the main parties to an important sector of the popular classes whose demands they consider retrograde.

Democracy as Agonistic Pluralism

If both political elites and mainstream political scientists have such difficulty coming to terms with the current situation, it is not only because they are blind to the problems of the popular sectors. Their incapacity to understand the rise of the extreme right is also due to their inadequate grasp of the construction of political identities. We will not be able to counter the right if we do not challenge the basic assumptions of the consensus approach. We need to grasp the role that antagonism plays in modern democratic politics. Indeed, one of the main problems nowadays is that the left's acceptance of pluralism and liberal democratic institutions has been accompanied by the mistaken belief that this meant abandoning any attempt to offer an alternative to the present hegemonic order. Hence the urge of many Socialist parties to locate themselves at the center.

But this is to miss a crucial point about the integrative effects of conflict in modern democracy. The specificity of democracy today lies in the legitimation of conflict and the refusal to suppress it through the imposition of an authoritarian order. Breaking with the symbolic representation of society as an organic body, democratic society makes room for the expression of conflicting interests and values.

A vibrant democratic life requires real debate about possible alternatives. Consensus is indeed necessary, but it must be accompanied by dissent. There is no contradiction here: consensus is needed on the institutions that are constitutive of democracy. But these institutions are the embodiment of "ethico-political" values, and there will always be disagreement concerning the interpretation of those values. We can indeed agree on the importance of "liberty and equality for all," while disagreeing sharply about their meaning and the way they should be implemented. This is what the struggle between left and right should be about. Instead of relinquishing them as outdated, we should redefine those categories. The objective is to allow for a real democratic confrontation about *political* values, phrased in terms of conflicting interpretations of a shared democratic tradition. When political lines become blurred, the dynamics of politics

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is obstructed and the constitution of distinctive political identities is hindered. Disaffection towards political parties sets in; participation declines. Alas, the result is not a more mature, reconciled society without sharp divisions but the growth of other types of collective identities around religion, nationalism, or ethnicity.

The Centrality of Politics

Politics aims at the creation of unity in a context of conflict and diversity; it is concerned with the formation of a "we" as opposed to a "them." The novelty of democratic politics is not the overcoming of this we/them opposition but the different way in which it is established. A pluralistic democratic order supposes that the opponent is not an enemy to be destroyed but an adversary whose existence is legitimate and must be tolerated. We will fight against her ideas but we will not put into question her right to defend them. This category of the adversary does not eliminate antagonism, though, and it should be distinguished from the liberal notion of the competitor with which it is sometimes identified. An adversary is a *legitimate* enemy, an enemy with whom we have in common a shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of democracy. But our disagreement concerning their meaning and implementation is not one that can be resolved through rational agreement, hence the antagonistic element in the relation. To come to accept the position of the adversary is to undergo a radical change in political identity. To be sure, compromises are possible; they are part of the process of politics. But they should be seen as temporary respites in an ongoing confrontation, not as the main aim of the democratic struggle.

Hence the importance of distinguishing between two types of political relations: one of antagonism between enemies, and one that I will call agonism between adversaries. Contrary to the liberal model of "deliberative democracy," according to which decisions on matters of common concern should result from free and unconstrained public discussion, this model of "agonistic pluralism" stresses that the aim of democratic institutions is not to eliminate antagonism or to relegate it to the sphere of the private (in order to establish a rational consensus in the public sphere). It is to provide democratic channels of expression for the legitimate forms of antagonism.

Once it is acknowledged that this type of agonistic pluralism is constitutive of modern democracy, we can understand why democracy cannot survive without collective identities formed around clearly differentiated positions. This is precisely the function of the left/right distinction: it is the way in which legitimate conflict is given form and institutionalized. If this framework does not exist, the transformation of antagonism into agonism will be blocked.

Nowadays it is urgent to reestablish the centrality of politics by drawing new political lines capable of giving a real impulse to democracy. The current absence of such lines is not an indication of progress, but the symptom of a void, a democratic deficit. As we have seen, the existence of such a void, in many countries, has provided the terrain where the extreme right works to create new political identities. Those identities endanger democracy because they are articulated around ethnic, nationalist, or religious issues. In those conditions, the opponent can only be envisaged as an enemy to be destroyed and not as an adversary whose rights must be respected.

One of the most important challenges for democratic politics today is to provide a political vocabulary for articulating the demands of groups exposed to the dislocating effects of globalization. These demands cannot be dismissed as archaic relics soon to be replaced by modern postconventional identities. They are the expression of antagonisms that need to be given a political outlet within a democratic project. To be sure, this is not an easy task; it requires putting into question many received ideas. But not confronting this challenge would mean renouncing the political struggle and abandoning the popular sector to the extreme right. □

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Ulrich Beck

FREEDOM FOR TECHNOLOGY!

A Call for a Second Separation of Powers

Modern life, precisely because it is fraught with so many problems, needs technological creativity as we need air to breathe. How else can we meet successfully such global challenges as the destruction of the environment, poverty, the population explosion, and the need to create meaningful forms of work? True, technology often solves problems that no one really worries about, problems that would not even exist without technology. Still, the degree to which we are dependent on technology becomes apparent only when we criticize it. Any criticism that wants to be taken seriously, that claims to make sense, must itself be grounded in technology, must use the language of technology. If we didn't trust technology, not one of us could step out onto the street. Like it or not, we must recognize that technology has become the prerequisite for the survival of the human race. That's one side of the issue.

The other side is that our uneasiness about technology keeps increasing, and not, as many scientists, doctors, and engineers would like to think, out of ignorance, but out of familiarity with the processes and potential applications of technology. Concerns about technology are no longer voiced by "out-of-work teachers" (as the sarcastic phrase went), but by nuclear technicians, biochemists, doctors, public health officials, neurophysicians, and geneticists. Some of these groups have started up their own journals and newsletters. As social survey research reveals, technological expertise and criticism of technology often go hand in hand, particularly among the young. In expressing their concerns about technology, people are simply articulating their instinct for self-preservation and their democratic impulses in a world where technology has long since become a political force of the first magnitude, permanently transforming all aspects of life. At almost every turn we find ourselves confronting worlds of our own making—mistakes, uncertainties, and catastrophes for which neither God nor nature, however defined, can be held responsible. As much as our civilization needs technology, it also needs imaginative, observant, and competent critics of technology—as a matter of survival. The critics have a far more important role to play than prodding technologists into building in a margin of safety that will pay off later on the world market.

How can we resolve the paradox that criticism of technology increases along with our dependence on technology? How can we unfetter the technological imagination without at the same time allowing technology to run wild in a way that threatens our freedom and our very lives? How can we install a steering mechanism and brakes in a scientific/technological civilization that tends to rush full speed ahead, unleashing explosive powers in the process? How can we change technology's self-image and the conditions that govern its existence?

Decontamination Through Silence?

Currently two approaches seem to represent the only alternatives: on the one hand, wholesale condemnation of any criticism of technology; on the other hand, obstruction of any new advance, couched in the demand that all probable impacts of a given technology be foreseen. The latter calls for expensive, time-consuming research of the sort that ends up throwing out the baby with the

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bathwater. As a result, in times of crisis, defenders of technology insist that it is not nuclear power plants, genetic engineering, or neurotechnology that pose a danger, but only loose talk about them. In 1986, the year of Chernobyl, Niklas Luhmann wrote that the risk society must "learn to live with catastrophes, and in fact live normally and calmly; for potential catastrophes won't be eliminated, but people will make things much worse by worrying needlessly." In other words, decontamination through silence! "Irresponsible talk of risk" interferes with economic recovery, costs jobs. How shortsighted this argument is must be obvious to those who will later have to pay the economic price for risks they have evaded—the large corporations and their management. Neurotechnology and human genetic engineering violate deep-seated cultural taboos. At the same time, they require billions in investment. Those who would hush up or sweep aside the uneasiness of the general public are building research empires and markets on quicksand. If the risk society becomes skeptical toward technology, such investments can be suicidal. The nuclear energy industry could tell us a thing or two about that.

I myself am skeptical toward the story told about technological progress, yet I am also sick and tired of always saying no to developments that neither I nor those professionally committed to a belief in salvation through technology can foresee or forecast. Ultimately it is runaway technology in the context of rapid modernization—driven by world markets—that produces the absurd spectacle of yea- and nay-sayers responding to developments whose consequences no one knows and that seem to take their course in any case. Ethics alone doesn't help; it comes along too late, trailing behind, its point of view that of an alien world. It has no more effect than a bicycle brake on an intercontinental aircraft.

We must get past these false alternatives, but how? My suggestion: not by going backward or coming to a dead stop, but by continuing onward in a new direction. The solution I would propose is *freedom for technology*. But at the same time the application of technology should be organized as a separate process, subject to the rules of codetermination, of ethics, of revisability, of tolerance for mistakes, in short, *technological citizenship*.

L'art pour l'art

Technology's horizon of possibilities—not necessarily the thinking and intentions of the individual expert—has historically been determined by military and industrial imperatives. Even Leonardo da Vinci designed fortifications and weapons to please his patron and make himself useful. Capitalism lives off the permanence of technological innovations, such as mass production of consumer goods (like the automobile and the refrigerator) calculated to reduce labor costs and replace human workers by machines. Technology has methodologically and culturally "internalized" these imperatives. As a matter of course we go by these principles: if it works, build it; if it can be marketed, produce it; if it strengthens the country militarily, make it. Inventions that disregard this law are not considered worthy of the name.

To change this state of affairs, we must create space for technology and technological experts not only to design new technologies but also to alter technology's prevailing norms. For instance, bringing technology into conformity with sound ecological principles will become possible only if young scientists have a chance to revise the prevailing technological paradigm. For that to happen, applied scientists must question their bondage to industry, break free, develop fundamental alternatives, confront their own doubts, limitations, and failings, and also fight for public awareness of the issues involved. Their goal must be to establish a self-defined and self-aware academic discipline focused on technology, a critical discipline. In other words, technology as *l'art pour l'art*, technology into the ivory tower! For this part of my proposal I usually receive lively applause from scientists in technological fields who long to be free to do primary research.

This model of self-definition and self-determination in technology can be made clearer through the analogy with art. Figuratively speaking, technology should take the leap from realistic to abstract painting. "We must force painting to give up its old habit of copying," Rimbaud wrote as early as 1871, "in order to make it au-

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tonomous. Instead of reproducing objects, it must evoke a response by means of lines, colors, and . . . shapes." To make technology autonomous, we must break it of its old habit of copying economic and military purposes. We need a Kandinsky, a Klee of engineers to reveal the *purity* of technology, its unique logic, its inherent principles, to argue them through, and to make them reveal themselves.

Only with the latitude provided by an "abstract" technology (abstracted from its military and industrial applications) could fundamentally different principles and ideas of development be invented, initiated, and implemented. First among these would be the vision of a technology that would sustain and promote the reshaping of industrial society according to ecological principles. Such a reshaping would include not only sparing use of resources, but a basic sensitivity toward materials—thus a "gentle" technology that recognizes and responds seriously to the unique logic of materiality. To use Martin Heidegger's metaphor: specialists in technology should learn to play, to make music on and with the world as a violin bow plays on the violin.

Second, it should become possible for us to avoid being blind to consequences when conceiving and designing specific technological systems. For instance, while possible military applications never fail to be anticipated, the so-called side-effects on nature, health, identity, and anthropology are not. Why shouldn't technological development itself be equipped with an "eye" that would enable it to foresee consequences and dangers?

Third, self-determined technological development of this sort could get rid of the concept of *Sachzwang* [compulsion inherent in things themselves] and replace it with the ethics and practice of identifying alternatives, thus opening up technology for citizenship. By systematically nurturing technological pluralism we could assure that an unending series of different and distinctive paths of development, scenarios for the future, a cornucopia of possibilities would be worked out and presented as the basis for nontechnical moral and political decisions. As a result, all talk of "technical necessity" would come to be regarded as antediluvian. Instead, we could ask for and search for institutions, structures, and sources to make technological citizenship possible.

But the analogy to art goes only so far. Art is a-, or perhaps anti-, moral, which the creation and transformation of the world and of life through technology can never be. The application of technology requires ethical justification, the imposition of limits, and participation roles. Not everything that *can* be made *should* be made. That brings me to my second point, which generally elicits a far less positive response from my technological colleagues: to reconcile technology to democracy, that is, insitutional space and occasions for public debate on different technologies must be created. This notion implies an ethics of foresight, that is, delaying implementation, preserving the possibility of revising decisions, a technology that is "tolerant of mistakes" (Christine von Weizsäcker) and open to participation. Only in this way could the question be broached as to how we really want to live—with or without technology? With what kind and goal of politically structured technology and how?

An Upper House of Technology

The dilemmas posed by uncontrolled technology stem, in fact, not from the autonomy of technological development but precisely from the lack of autonomy. In the context of a technology directed entirely by extraneous economic interests, inventiveness and discoveries automatically turn into uncontrollable upheavals and dangers. Neurotechnologies and genetic engineering are reshaping the laws that govern the human mind and life. Who is doing this? Technological experts? Medical experts? Politicians? Industry? The public? Ask any of them, and the reply will be the one Ulysses gave the Cyclops: nobody. Technological policy resembles the "nobody's rule" that Hannah Arendt tells us is the most tyrannical of all forms of power, because under it nobody can be held responsible.

To overcome this organized irresponsibility, we must relearn and reapply the quintessential liberal "art of separation" (Walzer), achieving a second separation of powers, this time between the creation and development of technologies

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that transform society on the one hand and their implementation on the other. If we liberate technology from the yoke of economic necessity, we will also have to reorganize its application. We must establish an autonomous process in which ethicists, politicians, the public, laypeople, and, in this chorus, of course, technological experts play their parts. One might locate this new process in a "council of technology." If we equip it with quasiparliamentary, quasijudicial powers, and institutionalize it as a sort of "upper house of technology" (Konrad Adam), the desired effect will be achieved. Only in this way will we create what has up to now seemed out of the question: a focus on context, an accompanying public dialogue, and the integration of issues of learning, activating consensus, and legitimation into the application of technology.

At present we give technological experts a free hand—legally and politically—to define what constitutes the "state of the art of technology." But since this concept includes safety standards, in Germany (and in other industrialized countries) it turns out to be private organizations and commissions (for example, the Association of German Engineers, or the German Institute for Standards) along with a handful of consultants who decide what risks are "acceptable." When it comes to culturally crucial questions such as genetic engineering, and probably medical progress in the neurotechnologies as well, the power to define the terms of discussion thus lies in the hands of a few. "Medicine has privileges," writes Jacques Testart, the French geneticist and "father" of the first test-tube baby, "unlike those of any other professional branch. . . . Whether cancer or AIDS, there are maybe ten to fifteen specialists who are calling the shots. And they really do what they please; they even dictate legislation, since government turns to them as advisors."

If we move beyond questions of official responsibility to the small print of safety regulations, the prevailing principle is that in all key questions—from the safety of nuclear reactors to clean air, from protection of water and limits on noise to medical intervention in life—it is not the parliaments, not the governments, not the citizens, not even the courts that shape the argument, but technical specialists and doctors. This is where the proposal for a second separation of powers becomes pertinent: just as the idea that the monarch was above the law had to fall by the wayside as we entered the modern era, so now, as we move toward a simultaneously self-defined and codeterminable technology, the discursive monopoly of the technical intelligentsia should be opened up to democratic rule. Only if this occurs will we be in a position to say yes to technology (and the creative imagination of technical experts)—and under certain circumstances to say no to its implementation. The time and place for saying yes or no or something in between would be provided by forms of technological citizenship combined in the upper house of technology, where ethical and political issues would have to be brought together before any decision could be made.

Up to now decision-making has occurred in the twilight zone where politics, science, and industry meet. As we know, corporations do not undertake their investments in order to make human beings happy or to avert future problems, but to open up promising markets. Corporations evaluate what the competition is doing and on the basis of market research make far-reaching and, in their view, imperative decisions on research and production priorities. "The central problem is that this sort of entrepreneurial creation of needs and channeling of innovation as a rule does not take place in response to but in the vanguard of social sensitivity and articulation of interests, and thus remains to a great extent uninfluenced by democratic discussion of guidelines for future technological development. It is based solely on the extent to which private-sector efficiency and profitability criteria can be realized" (Dolata). The first large project to come out of this supply-side development and implementation of technology was, and is, nuclear energy and the nuclear industry, which requires government financing and public legitimation. The new "problem children"—genetic engineering and neurotechnology—are likewise taking shape under this pressure to assert themselves in the marketplace. But how can one do research with the guillotine of investments in the billions hanging over one? And what questions can be

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asked under such circumstances? Here we find the source of that hostility toward technology that is actually only hostility toward runaway technology.

Reflexive Modernization

An appropriate response in a high-tech society that reserves the right to decide its own technological future would be to promote the establishment of an "art" of reflexive and self-skeptical technology. Only with this ivory-tower model will it be possible to dream and test out the dream of a truly modern technology that discovers and develops its own uncertainties, insecurities, lack of safety, its own peaceful and creative potentialities.

Technological experts would have to liberate themselves from the tyranny of the state and the economy—not only as it affects their external position, but also as it affects their image, their conception of technology—in order to liberate society from the tyranny of a technology imposed from without. This may sound paradoxical, but freedom *for* technology and societal liberation *from* technology could coincide. To put it another way: the radicalization of modern life—technology as *l'art pour l'art*—could also provide the prerequisites for solving the problems technology poses in terms of direction, control, and democratic participation.

Only if we undertake this intellectual experiment will we recognize that technology—the epitome of the modern—has been organized in a medieval way within the design of industrial society. We must help it emerge from what Kant would call its self-imposed immaturity and uncontrollability.

Translated from the German by KRISHNA WINSTON ☐

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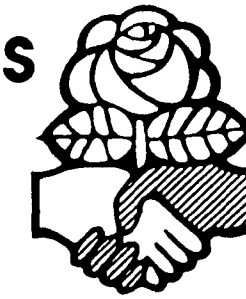

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Margaret Morganroth Gullette

THE WONDERFUL WOMAN ON THE PAVEMENT

Middle-Ageism in the Postmodern Economy

In 1994 a handsome woman appeared on television news in the Boston area: poised, energetic, well-groomed, with healthy body language—the kind of midlife woman who looks competent whether she's selling Tupperware or bonds or simply walking across a street. She said she was forty-five. In feminist eras like our own when ages over forty can be broadly represented as "wonderful," she was instantly recognizable as one of the wonderful midlife women. There are millions. On television, Patricia was articulate even though her self-confidence had been badly shaken. She was hired by the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination in a sting to test whether a woman her age could get a job in retailing at $6.00 an hour in competition with a younger woman. She and Becky, aged twenty-two, composed one set of four all-white teams matched for education, personal qualities, and (limited) work experience. It was a clear-cut test of the firms' ageist hiring practices. By the end, Patricia had been told there were no jobs or turned down by every retailer. Some didn't even take her résumé. The twenty-two-year-olds had frequently been offered full-time permanent jobs with benefits and ladders. The forty-five-year-olds had been offered a few jobs, but they were the new service jobs: seasonal and without benefits.

The midlife woman told me later that she was shocked and humiliated, and had become much more anxious about beginning her own real job search. I expect readers share her shock—but perhaps we are not surprised. Age discrimination at midlife is almost a silent given in America. Yet it affects more groups and classes than anyone has imagined. Middle-ageism in general threatens to reduce the power and earnings of the entire workforce, viciously curtail the American Dream, and embitter our image of the life course. It is an urgent issue.

I begin with the Wonderful Midlife Woman on the Pavement. The phrase encapsulates the situation of many women. She could be a woman of color; if so, statistically, her economic prospects would be worse. She is at risk even with education and a solid résumé behind her; women are dropping from high places too. Lotus fired business manager Carol Moskowitz, one of the highest-paid people in her department, after she turned fifty; the personnel manager admitted circling her age on the list. Moskowitz sued Lotus for discrimination and won money. But not enough people use civil law remedies; when they win they can be gagged; and the press doesn't publicize the victories enough.

Economically, the midlife can be the most critical part of the life course. Women may find themselves newly divorced, with no alimony and no work history. Many need to bolster Social Security, pensions, and savings before it's too late. They may need to care also for older relatives, help adult children. Some in "two-income households" are married to midlife men whose incomes have dropped or vanished. Women need full-time jobs at higher wages with upward mobility. They're able to work full time because they

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are "postmaternal." Projections are that they will constitute a growing percentage of the labor force. Fifty-four percent of women ages fifty-five to sixty-four are expected to be working by 2005, some 9 percentage points more than in 1990.[1] It's crucial to know what is now happening to women in the forty to fifty-four slot, a conjuncture of readiness, ability, and need. Free of child-care conflicts, prepared to work harder than a first-time entrant, with proven life skills, they should be desirable employees.

The Lead Ceiling

The reality, however, is grim. At forty-five, women's earnings have already peaked. Men earn more; and the male wage advantage, visible since one's twenties, looms enormous at midlife. The devastating news is that full-time work, a dire necessity for many, is becoming a "privilege" denied to midlife women, and men, as they age. Fifty seems to be a turning point, in one large and important study that disaggregated the data by age, gender, race, and education. Sixty-nine percent of black women in the five years after age forty-five are employed full time; only 44 percent in the five years after that—a drop of twenty-five points, the biggest five-year drop for any group, male or female. Seventy-nine percent of women college graduates have full-time work between ages forty-five and forty-nine; only 60 percent of those five years older do—a nineteen-point drop in the group of the most privileged.[2] And these data come from 1987-1988, before the recession and downsizings of the nineties.

Fifty is a drastic downward turning point for full employment for men too. Ninety percent of white men in this sample are employed between ages forty-five and forty-nine; at five years older, only 77 percent are—a thirteen-point drop. College-educated men suffer less (drop of eight points). African-American men as a whole don't drop then but suffer a drastic drop, of twenty-two points, five years older.

Midlife free-falls in full employment should be alarming even before we know exactly how different people leave full-time work or what they find to do for a living afterward. (Most observers believe that the rate of involuntary part-time employment is high.) Healthy, vigorous people lose jobs; so do well-trained experts. Many of those rising in the middle-class now hit the "glass ceiling" prematurely. Perhaps we should call it the lead ceiling; the glass ceiling can be pried open by affirmative action. Age discrimination is a solid lid: there is no way up. Some favored ones are enabled to "retire" prematurely. One way or another, at around age fifty many women and men are being forced out—out and down, into lower paid or part-time work, subemployment.

Being out in the job market in the nineties is a special hell for "older" people. An AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) sting used résumés of women and men whose age could be inferred as fifty-seven, versus those of people aged thirty-two. "Older job applicants are likely to confront age discrimination one of every four times they apply for available jobs," estimates AARP lawyer Cathy Ventrell-Monsees.[3] The ratio for women is probably worse than one in four. But men shouldn't be fooled by doing less badly than some women. They're doing badly enough.

There are underlying structural causes for our age quandary. There are not enough good jobs in the declining North American empire for the available workforce. The new unemployables are not being thanked, as Claus Offe suggested they should be in a recent essay in *Dissent* (Winter 1995). They have to be demonized or marginalized so victim-blaming can occur. The first visible victims were young black working-class men. As industries strive for "efficiencies," other categories will be marginalized, by whatever discriminations lie at hand. Few mainstream analysts have brought home to us the full horrors of a postindustrial, transnational economy intent on "the global drive to the bottom." One of them is premature superannuation. Age is proving to be a very useful discriminator, joining race, class, and gender. Middle-ageism may be the most efficient way to push wages toward the bottom, by cutting the top off a person's economic life curve.

Aging into the midlife is supposed to mean a curve of wages rising with age. (Up to a point.

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Men's earnings peak between forty-five and fifty-five, women's between thirty-five and forty-five.) That rising curve is the unspoken foundation of the American Dream: getting the kids more education, maybe helping them get started, saving a little, securing one's old age. Respect in America as one becomes middle-aged is dependent on these curves, these peaks. The dream of later, higher peaks has been shared more widely in the last thirty years, by African-Americans, women of all races and ethnicities, immigrants. The expansion of "seniority" depends on the continued existence of rising curves and high peaks.

Many economic facts portend the weakening of "seniority," broadly understood, at all class levels. As unions have declined, so have security, wage levels, regular raises, and protections against arbitrary dismissal for older employees. That was a rehearsal for the unorganized white-collar classes. When defense contracts disappeared, a firm in Massachusetts laid off every one of its computer consultants over fifty—over 25 percent of its workforce. In the medical profession, senior physicians perform under the supervision of accountants. Tenure is under attack in universities, in the silent practices of the two-tier system (part-time vs. full-time), as fewer young people are invited to enter on tenure tracks; as the boomers retire, the ratio of part-timers and adjuncts increases.[4] Those already climbing the ladder as well as those who are beginning to move their feet up, often find the rungs broken.

We seem to be in an era when capitalism and patriarchy are silently clashing over seniority. Why should postmodern capitalism let patriarchal midlife privilege endure if it gets in its way? When the most privileged groups (save for the top 1 percent to 10 percent) are vulnerable, what can stop the drive to the bottom? If anyone—if almost everyone—is at risk after age forty-five, then expectations of what management can do to labor have to be changed. Every value linked to the age-wage curve is at risk.

Age discrimination at midlife is a story that needs full exposure. We need to get beyond statistics, into the phenomena of middle-ageism, culture, politics, and pain.

Aged By Culture

Middle age doesn't exist, Fast Eddie. It's an invention of the media, like halitosis. It's something they tame people with.

—Walter Tevis, *The Color of Money*

The midlife, like all "life stages," is an invention of culture. In the nineties, it is becoming impossible not to notice the invention's disconcerting changes. It is obvious from the sting stories alone that in North American mainstream culture, "aging" begins very much earlier than old age. It's creeping down into the middle years. Aging at midlife is not biological; the more we investigate, the more it reveals itself to be a preponderantly "cultural" phenomenon. Economic forces multiply representational forces to make any subject liable to be labeled "aging" or "too old" at ages that should be the prime of life. For the ordinary person, once the first shock is absorbed, it is much easier to see and accept the cultural elements in midlife aging than in the aging of the elderly. No one can properly study "aging" who goes on naively believing that it is a natural process that has no history, no politics, and no future. Since everyone at midlife is going to need a politics and a future, we need to undertake "age studies"—an approach to age that is multidisciplinary, social-constructionist, text-based, alert to culture, and activist.

Age studies can use the midlife to complicate the definitions of "aging" or "age." These words should be put in quotation marks until we get the point. That "aging" connotes "old people" is now a clear mystification, implying as it does that nobody under sixty-five is subject to pejorative age hierarchies, characterizations, status losses, and job bias. The way we talk about age needs theoretical scrutiny. Everyone is aged by culture, just as everyone is gendered and racialized by culture. Being aged by culture begins as soon in a new life as adults first mention the subject: "You're not old enough to do that yet," or, shortly afterward, "You're too old for that now." Most of the early socialization prepares Americans to accept and apply to ourselves a negative label, "aging," at chronological ages that get younger all the time. Generation X already feels it's racing against time. Age effects intersect with gender, race, class, sexual orien-

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tation, ethnicity, region. These categories are used to keep the labor force divided and its workers in competition. One basic tenet of age studies is that the "midlife" adds another unexpected class to the mix, an age-class.

Under the media deluge, "aging Baby Boomers" are compressed into a false, flattering cohort universalism. Boomers are told they are entering into their most prosperous years on the age-wage curve. This factoid has prevented even experts from seeing that fifty is a dangerous age for growing numbers. It hides the men and women "displaced" with so many good years before them, the children dropping out of college, big debt, humiliating makeshifts, divorce, the shame of failing one's dependents and losing one's own sense of identity. It hides the desperation. A precariously employed fifty-five-year-old divorced woman I know is furious. "I can't retire. I've been working all my adult life and I can't afford to stop. I might live to be eighty—ninety. I'm not *middle-aged!* I'm scarcely into my middle years. Yes, I've been age-harassed, who hasn't?" In one interview where the interviewer asked illegal questions, he was her own age. Lured by its alleged and temporary riches, the age-class is being lulled into disregarding the economic disasters that everyone knows about and fears.

The more we study "the midlife" as it is spoken of now, the more clearly we see that it is a set of fictions. Anyone's "middle years" have a reality outside of the dominant narratives. But the social fictions are powerfully determining—like the one that tells personnel directors that Patricia, Carol, and the others are "too old." Patricia wasn't going to cost those companies more than Becky; not hiring her was a cultural decision. Carol and the computer consultants were relatively expensive—but it's at least as relevant that in cyberjobs youth is king (the average age at Lotus is thirty-four).

Making the wonderful woman appear "too old" is a cultural fiction, allied not only with older patriarchal stereotypes about postsexual and postmaternal women (which I think are weakening), but with an increasingly significant macroeconomic fact. Midlife men are also already being commercially aged by this culture: witness the ad in the *Washington Times* for cosmetic surgery, illustrated by a comfortable middle-aged man in an expensive business suit. Gary Trudeau in *Doonesbury* shows Rick Redfern suffering out loud on his fortieth birthday, buying wrinkle-remover and hair-cream while his little girl asks him, "Daddy, are you going to die?" The joke is an extraordinary example of early childhood training in age lore, and of the contradictions midlifers are expected to ignore: We can be sure we're "aging" horribly; we know we're going to live a long time. Men are likely to be aged by culture at midlife as women have been, with alleged physiological decline emphasized, and real "value added" minimized.[5]

"Too old" is a code, given meaning by infatuation with youth, enforced by the generation gap—an abyss constructed by the high-tech industries, niche-marketing, Gen-X culture, and narratives of midlife decline in cartoons, films, newspapers, conversation. The age impact of discourses and practices is not invisible. But while internalizing and reproducing them, people act as if the consequences were trivial and the sources of midlife ageism unalterable. Theorists and activists need to try to give urgency to anti-middle-ageism. We can expect that it will take enormous efforts of *concientización* to uproot damaging "too old" fictions, to keep alive the counter-fiction of the wonderful woman and to invent liberating counter-fictions for midlife men.

Midlife Muscle

Midlife women may prove to be a stubborn and difficult target of postmodern scarcity. We have been valorized by the historic accident of maturing within the subculture provided by feminism. Without exactly knowing it, feminism transformed our "aging" into "maturation." Many of us are the products of empowering profemale fictions: that a female collective can bring personal and social change, that social justice is worth working for, that the future is likely to be better than the past, and therefore, that it is probably better to be older than younger. These are some of the fictions that over time have *made* wonderful women—helped us counter sexist ageism and grow into activism. "Hope is a

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muscle," in the title of a current book; and that muscle has gotten stronger with aging and done some real work in the world.

Yet in the postmodern economy, whatever the wonderful woman has achieved of inner strength and midlife wisdom, not to mention work experience, may not avail her at the painful moment of the job search or at other crucial moments in work life, such as deciding whether to join a protest or a strike. Living in mainstream culture at this time, everyone is receiving mixed and contradictory messages about what midlife women are *worth* and what we can do. This is our postmodern quandary. Does this make us crazy or enraged, passive-depressives or outraged activists? Am I correct in fearing that the men who believe similar messages about life-course empowerment are few, and that, within the male left, anti-ageism is simply off the screen? Why this is so requires a separate investigation. Meanwhile, I believe the age-valorization accomplished by feminism can be a model, and must be. We need all the collective resistance we can muster.

There is a war going on within the culture about the representation of midlife women, between feminist-inspired fictions producing wonderful women, and antifemale fictions that update twentieth-century stereotypes of female midlife decline. And there's a war going on in midlife women's psyches, between an achieved sense of confidence and improved status and a fearful sense of danger and decline. There's no way to say how these wars will end. But I want to bring some news from the front. I studied both wars with a group of adult students at the Radcliffe Seminars, most in their forties and fifties. It was a course in contemporary age studies, analyzing age in texts with as much rigor as gender, race, and so on.

The course was called "Midlife Heroines." We read mostly novels. Since the mid-seventies, the culture has been blessed with conditions favorable to transvaluing the imagery of midlife women. A broad, published conversation began among major women novelists, themselves aging within feminism. In *Safe at Last in the Middle Years* I called the resulting productions "midlife progress novels." Women more than men have been writing novels about protagonists who grow as they age in ways that often do not rely on class privilege and money—who overcome bad fate, survive with courage, refuse self-pity, or actually move forward in some wished-for direction. From Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God* back in 1938 to Margaret Drabble's *The Realms of Gold* (1975), and since to Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), Doris Lessing's *Diary of a Good Neighbor* (1983), and May Sarton's *The Education of Harriet Hatfield* (1989), among others, enough older and freer heroines have come out to convince many readers that the midlife can be a time of recovery, if that is necessary, or of growth and accomplishment. In some novels the heroine is living in immiseration; in some, rising out of poverty. In none, however, is she economically at her wit's end. The novels are about spiritual triumphs and moral developments potentially accessible to all.

The women's novels don't merely show readers that women grow. The genre teaches readers psychological development and countercultural resistance. I'll give one brief example of how novels teach women to treat their own "postmaternal" phase. I wish I didn't have to argue that this is not trivial. Immense damage has been done to midlife women as workers and as selves in this century by the idea that once they are no longer raising children, they are idle, out of their one real job, unloved, despairing, and useless. Evan Connell's *Mrs. Bridge* redoes this dirty work. Mrs. Bridge ends up on the last page trapped in her car, in her garage, in the middle of winter, with no one likely to inquire what has become of her. Such representations are in no simple way realistic. The postmaternal woman changes when she is portrayed by a midlife woman in our era.

Eighties fiction provides a range of options for imagining one's way into postmaternity *and* work. In late midlife, Paule Marshall's Avey Johnson (*Praisesong for the Widow*, 1983) is going to have a closer relationship with her exigent daughter and a more meaningful vocation than she had in the earlier upwardly mobile bourgeois phases of life. Sethe, in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) keeps her family alive as a cook while she gets a ghost out of the house, the figure of the daughter she felt compelled to murder eighteen years before. Journalist Kate Armstrong

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in Margaret Drabble's *The Middle Ground* (1980) has internalized the stereotypical idea that a woman who has no child to raise is useless, but she overcomes this adverse self-judgment with new work. All the novels teach (in the ways that novels teach) rebuttals: alternative ways of feeling, tones of voice, verbal formulas, actions. They show midlife women as bearers of diverse energies.

And surveys show that many women are in synch with the empowering images: they have good self-esteem, they're not afraid of aging. Although the surveys are sometimes dubiously motivated, I believe they capture a phenomenon produced jointly by the civil rights and women's movements' political and economic successes and their allied fictions. Women who spent ten or more years in pre-movement America can't believe how far they've come. And if the fiction of progress turns out to have been a historical fluke, the representational legacy left for future women at midlife will prove a treasure. Feminism has been learning to add up the ways in which representation matters. If the feminist left has better integrated cultural concerns into its other interests than the male left, as some of us believe, perhaps this is why.

It was dismaying to turn to mainstream so-called nonfictional discourses. Each participant clipped out everything she found about midlife women in the course of her normal reading. "Normal reading" was a crucial component of the task. I wanted to find out what "information" each reader would absorb about "midlife women" just by casually perusing whatever newspapers, magazines, and journals she ordinarily received. Nineteen-ninety-two and ninety-three should have been an upper: the so-called Year of the Woman was, more exactly, the Year of the Successful Midlife Woman, the Star. There were numerous positive "role-modeling" images, starting with Hillary Rodham Clinton. There were some firsts. There were many just-doing-the-job stories: California Treasurer Kathleen Brown selling $3 billion of state prison-expansion bonds on Wall Street. A new federal player was given the kind of unofficial amnesty that men in power typically obtain: Janet Reno after Waco. In terms of status, women seemed to be doing okay. I say "seemed to be," because these were women with careers, not wanting jobs, and there was no news about the latter. The media slight labor news, and even within labor news the ordinary wonderful midlife woman does not cut a big figure.

Of course, anonymous women in news stories are mostly presented as passive victims of male events: mothers in little wars far away, bending over their sons' coffins. Domestically, most of the negative images came in the health news. The menoboom was in full sway, producing gruesome anecdotes and making menopause so public that no one of a certain age could blush anymore without knowing that others had received a signal about her bodily fluids and her fearful future. But menopause discourse wasn't the popular culture story that most shocked the seminar participants. Many had been outraged by the discovery of how discrepant care for heart disease was, with men getting better attention before heart attacks and better treatment afterward. That was important news—coming to us because of activism in women's health care, political pressure on the National Institutes of Health. In a state unwilling to provide universal health insurance and allied to powerful medical and insurance interests, a great deal of ageist culture goes to show that "Women never die, they just cost more."

Nobody is untouched by feminist representation and social change; nobody is totally immune to sexist ageism. The average woman is armored, although probably not as well as she thinks. That ageism reaches into the culture everywhere, she gets more convinced every day.

Midlife women need to take their postmodern quandary seriously, and ponder it collectively, with older and younger women, and men. To the extent that women believe in our value at midlife, we are likely to resent any attempts—discursive and economic—to reduce our status or economic participation or any other of our hard-won gains. Resentment might lead to resistance. Comprehensive discussions about the new economic order have to state fully the remorseless power of middle-ageism. We all have to push a nonsexist nonracist anti-ageist agenda, as we try to cope with this overwhelming new situation. The power

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of the women's movement has been implicitly grounded on having achieved economic gains. If this begins to slow down, if advances turn out to benefit only younger women, what will happen to feminism? The movement cannot focus on gains for younger women assuming that these automatically translate into gains for the same women as they age.

What can keep newly energized men from focusing on men's needs at midlife and crowding out the plight of women? If midlife men join, finally convinced of mutuality of interests, what would induce younger men to join? What about the relations between the economic, the political, and the representational? How can we explain the screwy lack of synchrony? What adjustments must we make in theory when solid representational advances bring personal empowerment in lieu of economic gains? How can we try to control—or at least resist—popular representations of midlife? What fictions would empower midlife men, and what would cause men to write them? How, given the unconscious ageism of the media, the rightward politics of the nation, and the power of global enterprises, can collectives with an anti-ageist agenda produce change?

This discussion, galvanized by "midlife" interests, should propel people in the women's movement, cultural studies and the critical social sciences, among others, into a phase of age studies in which they are all more closely connected. It should be a broad-based conversation, a basis for coalition building across class, race, gender, and age divisions. Two final questions unsettle all the previous ones. Given that the midlife members of so many of these constituencies are secured from threatened disasters by "seniority"—the ownership of tenure or apparently unassailable professional standing or the equivalents—will the conversation even begin? Before seniority crumbles, who will use the power now available to publish or broadcast these issues, frame the questions in the right way—at least let the conversations start? □

Notes

[1] Paula Rayman, Kimberly Allshouse, and Jessie Allen, "Resiliency Amidst Inequity: Older Women Workers in an Aging United States," in *Women on the Front Lines: Meeting the Challenge of an Aging America*, ed. Jessie Allen and Alan Pifer (Washington, D. C.: Urban Institute Press, 1993) 134.

[2] The data come from Larry L. Bumpass and William S. Aquilino, "A Social Map of Midlife," MacArthur Research Network on Successful Midlife Development, March 1994, Table 55. Their study uses the 1987-88 National Survey of Families and Households.

[3] Robert Lewis, "Tests Find Age Bias in Hiring," AARP *Bulletin* (February 1994), p. 2.

[4] Daniel S. Hamermesh, "A Ray of Sunshine? The Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession 1994-95," *Academe* (March-April 1995), p. 13 and n8.

[5] See my "All Together Now: The New Sexual Politics of Midlife Bodies," *The Male Body*, ed. Lawrence Goldstein (Michigan University Press, 1995).

dissent

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Christopher Hitchens

OSCAR WILDE'S SOCIALISM

In conversation with Granville Barker, George Bernard Shaw once bragged that the comedy of his plays was the sugar that he employed to disguise the bitter socialist pill. How clever of the audience, replied Barker, to lick off the sugar and leave the bitter pill unswallowed. Of no play in the whole repertory of well-loved drama could this be more truly said than Oscar Wilde's masterpiece in three acts, *The Importance of Being Earnest*. First performed in 1895, to applause that has never died away, it coincided with Wilde's challenge to the infamous Marquess of Queensberry and with his decision to face his tormentors in court. That drama, which also fell into three acts (Wilde's suit; Queensberry's counter-attack; the prosecution of Wilde himself for immorality on the evidence of the first two trials) marked his utter eclipse and decline. In this centennial of Wilde's triumph and ignominy, what can be done to honor his play as it should be honored?

The Importance is so diverting and witty and fast-moving, and so replete with imperishable characters and *mots*, that it has been a staple of Anglo-American drawing-room comedy for generations. And, despite the cloud under which its author languished for so long (a cloud, as someone once observed, hardly bigger than a man's hand) the play has been deemed fit for even the most demure school productions and amateur fiestas. It is a safe bet that Wilde would have appreciated the joke, because we know that he concealed at least one and—I would argue—probably two subtexts in his brittle dialogue.

The first subtext is of course a homosexual one. To be "earnest" in Victorian London was to be gay in the slang of the underworld and the *demi-monde* ("I hear he's frightfully earnest") so that one of the coded laughs at least was up in lights in the middle of the most ostensibly moral and bourgeois capital in history. But the game is deeper than that. The two young men who feature as the play's central rivals, Jack Worthing and Algernon Moncrieffe, are both portrayed as leading double lives, and as adopting alter egos, in order to pursue their true desires. The name Bloxam is used for a minor character, but those in the know would have recognized Jack Bloxam, editor of a high-risk homosexual aesthetic magazine to whom Wilde had promised *Phrases and Philosophies For the Use of the Young* ("The first duty in life is to be as artificial as possible. What the second duty is no one has as yet discovered"). The magazine, which ran to exactly one edition, was suggestively entitled *The Chameleon*.

Other private or encoded jokes in the play range from the risqué and the nearly obvious (such as the tragedy of young men not turning out to resemble their mothers) to the argot of homosexual tradecraft. The practice of leading a secret life under a pseudonym, known as "Bunburying," would have had some members of the audience biting on their umbrella handles. "Cecily," the name given to one of the weightless and vapid society girls, was also gay vernacular for transvestite rent-boys. Looked at in the right way, or played to the knowing ear, even the cloakroom at Victoria Station—scene of the loss of the famous handbag—takes on the charged association of a cruising spot or pick-up joint.

There was originally a fourth act to the play, in which Algernon was taken to Holloway Prison for failing to pay his bills at the Savoy. If that

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denouement had been retained, the coincidence between art and life would have been almost unbearable. Even as it is, the banter of *The Importance* does throw one shadow forward into the future. When Jack Worthing tells Canon Chasuble that his invented brother has died, and "seems to have expressed a desire to be buried in Paris," the worthy Canon shakes his head and says: "In Paris! I fear that hardly points to any very serious state at the last."

The second of the two subtexts—the socialist one—is less fraught with ironies, and less apparent to superficial reviewers, but is in fact what gives the play its muscle and nerve. In *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (which had to be published for a time as *The Soul of Man* in order to avoid objections from publishers and distributors) Wilde had subjected the bourgeois order to a merciless critique. In particular, he had shown the Victorian attitude toward marriage as an exercise in the mean-spirited preservation of private property, as well as a manifestation of sexual repression and hypocritical continence. In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the same polemical objective is pursued, but by satirical means. Absurd and hilarious dialogues about betrothal, inheritance, marriage settlements, and financial dispositions are the very energy of the play. Everybody is supposed to marry for money and give up liberty; everybody is constrained to pretend that they are marrying for love or romance. "When I married Lord Bracknell," says Lady Bracknell, "I had no fortune of any kind. But I never dreamed for a moment of allowing that to stand in my way." It is, indeed, dear Lady Bracknell who continually gives the game away. When she hears that Cecily will inherit a hundred and thirty thousand pounds she declares, "Miss Cardew seems to me a most attractive young lady, now that I look at her. Few girls of the present day have any of the really solid qualities, any of the qualities that last, and improve with time."

Her instinctive class consciousness makes her the arbiter of every scene. Inquiring of Jack the suitor whether he has any politics, and receiving the answer that "I am afraid I really have none. I am a Liberal Unionist," she ripostes, "Oh, they count as Tories. They dine with us. Or come in the evening at any rate." Pressing him further on his eligibility and inquiring as to whether his money is in land or investments, she is told, "Investments, chiefly," and muses aloud:

> That is satisfactory. What between the duties expected of one during one's lifetime, and the duties exacted from one after one's death, land has ceased to be either a profit or a pleasure. It gives one position, and prevents one from keeping it up.

This more or less precisely describes the dilemma of the English aristocracy when faced with the Industrial Revolution, and captures it more neatly than Engels ever managed to. Indeed, one expert on this period, Frances Banks, has argued convincingly that much of the play is also a satire on the Cecil dynasty, whose scion, Robert Marquess of Salisbury, was three times a Tory prime minister in the late Victorian epoch. His biographer was his daughter, Lady Gwendolen Cecil. The two girls in the play are named Gwendolen and Cecily. The Salisbury family motto, just for good measure, is *Sero Sed Serio*: "Late but in earnest." And the great family estates were linked to London by a network of those railways in which the landed classes took such an early and profitable interest. In every scene of *The Importance of Being Earnest* there is at least one joke about the railways, with a repeated play on words that depends for its effect on the echoes of "line" and "lineage."

There is little if any strain involved in making these conjectures, because we know that Wilde read the literature of socialism, attended meetings, and kept company with leading socialists such as Shaw (who didn't like *The Importance,* typically regarding it as frothy). Wilde was the only public figure in London to sign Shaw's petition about the Haymarket martyrs. He took an active interest in the rising labor movement, and in the work of William Morris and other leading critics of capitalist utilitarianism. The kernel of his credo, however, is to be found in the offhand remark made by Algernon Moncrieffe at the opening of *The Importance*, where he reflects, "Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility." Here, in a well-turned aside, is the cruelty and thoughtlessness of all theorizing about the deserving rather than the undeserving poor. Wilde never lost his revulsion

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against sermonizing of this kind, and maintained that it was finer to steal rather than to beg; just as it was morally deaf to preach strict dieting to those suffering from malnutrition. It was for guessing at the secret hatred and coldness, which at all times underlay the English profession of charity and moral hygiene, that he made the enemies who rejoiced in his abjection.

Britain was at the time engaged in a grim, self-righteous attempt to hold onto its oldest colony in Ireland. British secret police circles were later to use the weapons of blackmail and moral exposure to destroy two of the bravest spokesmen for Irish independence—Charles Stewart Parnell and Sir Roger Casement. It's unlikely that Wilde's mordant observations about the empire's treatment of his homeland would have escaped the attention of the prurient. In a tremendously prescient review in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1889, he saw precisely why England's hold on Ireland would weaken:

> If in the last century she tried to govern Ireland with an insolence that was intensified by race hatred and religious prejudice, she has sought to rule her in this century with a stupidity that is aggravated by good intentions. . . . An entirely new factor has appeared in the social development of the country, and this factor is the Irish-American and his influence. To mature its power, to concentrate its actions, to learn the secrets of its own strength and of England's weakness, the Celtic intellect has had to cross the Atlantic. At home it had but learned the pathetic weakness of nationality; in a strange land it realized what indomitable forces nationality possesses. What captivity was to the Jews, exile has been to the Irish. America and American influence has educated them.

Though this review, too, contained some instances of Wilde at his most aphoristic ("That the government should enforce iniquity and the governed submit to it, seems to Mr. Froude, as it certainly is to many others, the true ideal of political science. Like most penmen he overrates the power of the sword"), it demonstrates that he could dispose also of a solid and grounded political intelligence. Within a few years of Wilde's death, the American citizen Eamon de Valera had in effect out-generaled the British empire. Only this year came yells of anguish from the British Tories as a Republican guerrilla was greeted on the White House lawn, and London (which believed itself to have an exclusive "special relationship" with the American Empire) gnashed impotently at this reminder of blood debts incurred decades before.

In a similar vein, Wilde reviewed the poems that Wilfred Scawen Blunt published from prison, and announced that the self-righteous Tory "intellectual" Arthur Balfour had, if nothing else, improved Blunt's style and address as a poet by committing him to jail for his agitation upon the Irish question. Wilde's banter at Balfour's expense was exactly designed to be of the sort that would land him in trouble—Blunt himself noticed the same tendency at a lunch for Herbert and Margot Asquith, when Wilde teased the entire assembly of the Establishment and won every round—but at least this serves to correct the later picture of Wilde as an epicene dandy whose sallies were confined to the lounge. "Literature is not much indebted to Mr. Balfour for his sophistical *Defence of Philosophic Doubt*, which is one of the dullest books we know, but it must be admitted that by sending Mr. Blunt to jail he has converted a clever rhymer into an earnest and deep-thinking poet." The intention of Balfour and his class, by committing Wilde to jail, was to achieve something like the opposite effect. (Just to increase the *frisson*, it's worth noting that Blunt's volume of poems was entitled *In Vinculis*, later to be the subtitle of Wilde's own prison testimony *De Profundis*.)

We can therefore situate Wilde firmly in the company of the Victorian socialist aristocracy; a radical elite, contemporary with Marx himself, which wrote and acted with great distinction. Its contribution has largely been forgotten, because as George Dangerfield so hauntingly records in his book *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, it was overwhelmed by the First World War that it tried so hard to prevent. I've already mentioned William Morris, who is remembered still as a Pre-Raphaelite and aesthete rather than as an orator and polemicist. Wilde's set also included Blunt, who probably did more than any other single author for the emancipation of the colonies, and who is an honored figure today in Egypt, India, Ireland, and other former precincts of the Empire on which the sun never set (and on which, as the Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor once remarked, the blood never dried).

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One might also mention R.B. Cunninghame-Graham, the friend and inspiration to Joseph Conrad, who rounded off a whole career of travel and writing and anti-imperialist adventure by getting himself elected as the first explicitly socialist member of the House of Commons. In the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, men like this fought to build up an educated labor movement, to win independence for Ireland, and to advance and guarantee the rights of women. The terrible year of 1914, and the attendant capitulation of the Socialist International, put an end to what had been one of the most revolutionary and democratic periods in modern history. From then on, the choice would be made between official and routine Laborism and the disciplined apparatus of Leninism and its mutations. Imperialist war—the outcome of an ostensibly "liberal" imperium—had very nearly returned civilized Europe to a barbaric state. This does not entitle us to forget a more noble and defeated tradition, in which Wilde, among others, took an honorable place.

I am not employing the terms "aristocracy" or "noble" by accident. In all of Wilde's radical writing there is an unashamed belief that those who suffer or dare for freedom are a kind of elect—not the insipid and overbred aristocracy of wealth and property that he lampooned, but an elect nonetheless. Though he was skeptical of organized religion and in most conscious moments considered himself a Hellenist, he employed biblical and prophetic imagery to mark off martyr from mob. Richard Ellmann points out very deftly the ambivalence of his *Sonnet to Liberty*, in which he expressed distaste for those whose anger arose from mere resentment:

> Not that I love thy children, whose dull eyes
> See nothing save their own unlovely woe,
> Whose minds know nothing, nothing care to know—

Yet at the close of the poem, Wilde also distinguishes himself from the Lady Bracknell types who talked selfishly about the "worst excesses of the French Revolution" and predicted that education for the poor would "lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square":

> ...and yet, and yet,
> those Christs that die upon the barricades,
> God knows it I am with them, in some things.

Elements of this tension are apparent in Wilde's play *Vera or, The Nihilists*, in which he foreshadowed the coming Russian revolution. He was always to be upset and disillusioned by the failure of this play, which was based upon the true story of Vera Zasulich, a proto-Bolshevik woman who assassinated the St. Petersburg chief of police in January 1878. (This action led to a feverish discussion among the anti-czarist forces about the morality and efficacy of "individual terrorism," partly because the assassination proved both popular and effective.) And Wilde was a personal friend of another Russian revolutionary, Sergei Kravchinski, who had also shot a czarist torturer and who lived as a well-liked emigré in London circles. Drawing on Bakunin and Nechayev's *Revolutionary Catechism*, and on his reading of Dostoyevsky and Turgenev, Wilde fashioned a play about propaganda by deed. The hero is beyond doubt Prince Paul Maraloffski, who falls out with the czar and joins the revolutionary conspirators. "In a good democracy," opines this prince at one crucial moment, "every man should be an aristocrat."

This addiction to paradox, which was always his most penetrating method in any case, led Wilde to state at the opening of *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* that socialism's great benefit would be the abolition of that "sordid necessity of living for *others*" that was everywhere so oppressive. The effect of this rather flippant-seeming introduction was to peel the whiskers from the face of Church and State, which had bound every citizen into a nexus of obligation and guilt. For Wilde, all talk of "the masses" and "the people" was suspect, because these categories were made up of individuals and it was the free development of each individual that counted. He occupied a position somewhere between Karl Marx and William Morris; between the idea that labor was something to be transcended and the idea that it was something to be made artistic and enjoyable. Under no circumstances should socialism become the brute collectivization of existing drudgeries. In an 1889 review of Edward Carpenter's socialist songbook *Chants of Labour*, Wilde wrote that

> Socialism is not going to allow herself to be trammeled by any hard and fast creed or to be stereo-

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> typed into an iron formula. She welcomes many and multiform natures. She rejects none and has room for all. She has the attraction of a wonderful personality and touches the heart of one and the brain of another, and draws this man by his hatred of injustice, and his neighbour by his faith in the future, and a third, it may be, by his love of art or by his wild worship of a lost and buried past. And all of this is well. For to make men Socialists is nothing, but to make Socialism human is a great thing.

This was written a hundred years before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Much of it was a statement of desire rather than belief in any case, and later sections of the review betray some misgivings. Of many of the proletarian anthems, Wilde wrote that "almost any mob could warble them with ease." Approving Edward Carpenter's sentiment, which was common in those brave radical days, that the masses did indeed have an appreciation of beauty and finesse, he closed by saying:

> The Reformation gained much from the use of popular hymn-tunes, and the Socialists seem determined to gain by similar means a similar hold upon the people. However, they must not be too sanguine about the result. The walls of Thebes rose up to the sound of music, and Thebes was a very dull city indeed.

It cannot be mistaken to see in this and other Wildean observations a coded plea for the right to live as a sexual outlaw, an eternal dissident and an enemy of the regimented, the "healthy," and the "natural." It was this set of affinities, indeed, which involved Wilde in almost his last polemical battle; one that was to reverberate long after his death.

In 1892 the German author Max Nordau published his book *Entartung*, which translates either as "Degeneracy" or "Degeneration." It was a stern and somewhat dirty-minded philippic against those who led unwholesome lives or who professed admiration for unnatural philosophies. The volume was dedicated to Cesare Lombroso, pioneer of racist phrenology and coiner of the pseudo-science of the "criminal type." It exuded admiration for racial strength, nature-worship, orthodox manliness, and artistic convention. In identifying the sources of that degeneracy that was sapping the vital fluids of civilization, Nordau made a prime exhibit of Wilde. Claims of genius were merely neurotic, said Nordau, and homosexuality was the greatest degeneracy of all. Wilde, who was by this time being hideously maltreated in an English prison, attempted a feeble defense by pleading that if homosexuality was an illness it should not be punishable but treatable—a sad hostage to fortune. Recovering a little of his old form after his release, he said, "I quite agree with Dr. Nordau's assertion that all men of genius are insane, but Dr. Nordau forgets that all sane people are idiots." Bernard Shaw wrote a riposte to Nordau, staunchly maintaining that here in a new and more virulent form was the traditional superstition that the stock was weakening and civilization going to the dogs. (Given Shaw's own interest in eugenics, that was quite a strong reply.)

Two historical ironies arise from this little-remembered combat. Max Nordau was, with Theodor Herzl, one of the founders of political Zionism. To this day, the supporters of the ultra-Orthodox and ultranationalist forces in Israel refer to assimilated or secular Jews as "Hellenized"—the worst insult in their lexicon, and one that might have called forth a sympathetic smile from Wilde. Second, Nordau's Jewishness and Zionism did not prevent the resuscitation of his book by the Nazis after Germanys defeat in the First World War. "Degeneration" became the summary word for everything—cosmopolitan, Mediterranean, skeptical—that the New Order regarded as weak or treacherous in the German character. Those who have visited the exhibitions of *Entartete Kunst* ("Degenerate Art") put on by the Nazis will see the force of the campaign that listed "pacifism" and antimilitarism along with mental illness, physical deformity, and the mockery of religion as enemies of the state. A parallel exhibition, entitled *Entartete Musik*, had as its poster and advertisement a thick-lipped Negro blowing into a saxophone and displaying a star of David on his lapel.

Wilde's misgivings about socialism—that it would prove humorless, uniform, and hostile to the untamed and the emotional and aesthetic were to be fully materialized in National Socialism. He might have wished to protest that this was taking the business of paradox too far. □

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Lani Guinier

THE MINER'S CANARY: RACE AND THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

The invitation to respond to David Plotke's essay, "Racial Politics and the Clinton-Guinier Episode" (*Dissent*, Spring 1995) came as I was preparing to travel to Budapest to attend a conference hosted by Eastern and Central European academics and politicians. This accident of timing gave me the opportunity to reassess in international context Plotke's thesis that talk about racial unfairness incites racial polarization. Experimenting with graduate students in Hungary, Plotke ostensibly uncovered tangible proof that race talk is inevitably coercive and divisive. Plotke showed the students my picture. After viewing the visual evidence, they tried to designate my ethnicity. They concluded that I might be North African but was probably Italian. They failed to "authenticate" my black American identity because ethnicity, not race, is their dominant frame of reference. Likewise, they were unfamiliar with the infamous American one-drop rule, where one drop of black blood makes me "black." Plotke concludes that the rigid character of racial categories in the United States means racial denial or racial deceit are necessary elements of progressive coalitions.

Not too long after reading Plotke's vignette, I happened to be in a West Philadelphia parking lot, when the attendant, a dark-skinned black man in his early thirties, shouted to me from a distance of two hundred feet, "Are you the one that was supposed to be appointed to Clinton's cabinet?" Although my interlocutor had not gotten the title exactly right, I nodded to affirm his basic assessment of my "dis-appointment." He then got very excited and continued the exchange, pumping both his arms in the air for emphasis. "I know why you didn't get that job," he announced. "You were too black. You were just too black." Using the language of race, the attendant told me that we are *not* our color or our gene pool; what we think is not the same as what we look like.

That graduate students in Hungary and a parking attendant in West Philadelphia can look at the same person and see different people should not surprise. After all, in the postmodern world, where you sit determines what you see. From where I sit in the United States, anyway, race matters overtly to those people who have historically been racialized (people of color).[1] It also matters covertly to those whose colorlessness is the result of historical privilege that allowed color not to matter and among those who have cultivated a willful blindness to the continuing impacts of color in a genuine desire to be inclusive.[2]

Once I got to Hungary, I did not ask my hosts to guess my race because, unlike Plotke, I did not worry about how people there designated me. What I did ask was: where are you going and how do you intend to get there?

I learned from my counterparts in Hungary three important lessons. First, they reminded me that the goal of a genuine, multiracial democracy should be to maximize participation by individuals and groups, without requiring monolithic group identities. We can recognize the political interests of racial groups without conflating the concepts of identity and politics or reducing "the political to the social." Second, I learned that those, like Plotke, who fear that frank discussions about race will reinforce

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racial divisions and threaten centrist Democratic coalitions have taken exactly the wrong lessons from Eastern Europe about balkanization and democracy. The experience of the Balkans shows that recognizing difference is an essential precondition to meaningful collaboration. Racial silence reinforces rather than erases racial categories. Third, winning in an adversarial, winner-take-all environment, without changing the terms and conditions of the debate, does little for most of the constituents Plotke and I both care about. While the Eastern and Central Europeans talk about politics and dream of democracy, we talk about elections and dream about winning. We spend little time imagining ways in which electoral victories translate into governing alliances that do things that matter. Indeed, elections won without either a clear link to governance or an energized grassroots base become empty public relations victories. If we were to follow Plotke's logic, coded, safe conversations might occur, but only among policy experts within a steadily shrinking democratic polity.

Thus I take issue with both themes of Plotke's essay: (1) that racial silence is necessary to forge cross-racial majorities and (2) that we should choose raceless forms of deliberation, lesser-of-two-evils voting, and centrist messages to promote progressive political outcomes. In my view, America's problems require democratic, meaning participatory, solutions in which we view our diversity as a distinct advantage in a changing world.

1. *Identity politics is not the same as proportional representation of political identities.*

Plotke challenges the idea that racial categories have political significance. He considers blacks primarily a social group, who may or may not have political interests in common. Moreover, he urges us to avoid the concepts of identity and authenticity, since "both terms refer to a political interpretation of a social groups' experience" and "*presume* tight links between social experience and political views" (my emphasis). Thus he thinks my advocacy of race-neutral electoral arrangements to represent black political interests is divisive and politically naive.

Certainly Plotke is correct that race is not a universal signifier. Race *per se* is neither a political explanation nor a political status. Consequently, identity politics may be an incomplete and misleading account of political struggle. Nevertheless, when given a choice, most blacks do behave as a political, not just a social, group. My experience in the West Philadelphia parking lot is instructive. There a physically black working-class man identified politically with a racially ambiguous looking female law professor; in other words race, as a political interest, can and often does transcend class, gender, and color. Likewise, all data I have ever seen assessing voting behavior supports the conclusion that most American blacks behave in ways that are politically cohesive.[3]

The challenge is to empower the electoral choices of black voters without drawing political boundary lines that posit a fixed, almost natural, boundary around something, such as racial identity, which is in fact not stable. Indeed, I have suggested nondistricted solutions such as cumulative voting (in which each voter gets the same number of votes as open seats and the voters "district" themselves by the way they cast their ballots, stacking multiple votes in support of their most preferred candidates) because it only recognizes group identity when voters voluntarily choose to act politically based on that identity.[4]

The real value in exploring alternative election systems, however, is that engaging with and trying to remedy the experience of racial underrepresentation can provide useful lessons about democracy for all groups, not just blacks.[5] Cumulative voting might also disaggregate the white majority by opening up the political system to many other underrepresented groups. These other groups are not necessarily geographically concentrated, nor is their political potential enhanced or even recognized by contemporary patterns of incumbent-controlled winner-take-all districting. Such groups include women, gays and lesbians, environmentalists, and rural poor people.

To encourage voter participation, therefore, I argue that (a) it is important to think in terms of one vote-one value—every voter (one vote) should have a chance to vote for someone who gets elected (one value)—and (b) that someone

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who gets elected should be chosen by and accountable to the voters he or she represents (that is, authentic).

Authenticity depends upon maximizing voter choice as a check on the self-centered impulses of powerful, professional political incumbents. Authenticity, therefore, means accountability. Accountability to one's constituents does not foreclose accountability to a larger purpose or a commitment to deliberation and collaboration about a common good. What it does preempt is the individual-centered politics of "the permanent campaign" in which elected officials are preoccupied with their own personal, public relations success.

2. *The lessons of balkanization suggest that compulsory suppression of racial or ethnic difference is disruptive and polarizing; the experience of racial minorities is "the miner's canary": a visible sign of deeper problems within a democracy.*

Plotke and I agree that democratic political procedures should enhance shared values across racial groups. We also both believe that progressive political strategies depend on building cross-racial majorities. We differ, however, on the tactics to be deployed in support of these projects, particularly whether to conceal the role of race.

Starting with the controversy over my nomination as assistant attorney general for civil rights, Plotke argues that a candid conversation about race is inadvisable, because I, like other black intellectuals, overstate the role of race and emphasize racial exclusion instead of simple political weakness. Therefore, Plotke concludes that President Bill Clinton correctly assessed his own political viability when he withdrew the nomination without a Senate hearing. To talk honestly about race would wreak havoc with Clinton's fragile, centrist coalition.

Plotke seeks to present a more "balanced judgment about current inequalities." By this he seems to mean that if we rename racial exclusion or marginality as simply the "politics of losing" we will reduce race to its proper place as a partial, and not-to-be-talked-much-about explanatory variable in American politics. In the interest of what I can only describe as faux racial unity, Plotke is sympathetic to those who urge us not to speak of race in order to keep a progressive coalition of whites and blacks functioning in a way that will help Democrats of moderate to liberal persuasion to get elected.

In this electoral strategy, the payoff to blacks and other people of color is admittedly modest. Isolated by right-wing racial appeals, people of color gain little from centrist-right coalitions precisely because race divides us. Plotke knows this, but he attacks those who name the racial nature of losing. It is politics, not race, he insists. Blacks are simply numerically weak political outliers.

In defense of this posture, Plotke cites the danger of balkanization—that we might become like the East Europeans I met. Yet, the Balkans became a universal symbol of ethnic polarization precisely *because* there was coerced silence on difference. Prohibitions on celebrating ethnic customs or speaking native languages fanned the flames of ethnocentrism.[6] Minorities articulated separatism to protect their sense of self and sense of place.

The problem of "race" in the Balkans, a problem derived in large part from the artificiality of many national boundaries, is a problem with which these states now grapple, by explicitly recognizing *for the first time* the constitutional rights of groups. Theirs is a solution that seeks to include all citizens through proportional representation of ethnic minorities.

The Slovakians, for example, require minor parties to obtain a certain percentage of the vote before they will be accorded legislative seats proportionate to their vote total. Slovakians worry whether to have higher thresholds for combined or aggregated minority groups than for single parties; they don't worry about the threshold issue of whether to include those ethnic groups as groups. Unlike here, they understand the need to tinker with election techniques in order to accomplish political inclusion and secure the overall legitimacy of the system. They do not labor under the hubristic attachment of a "mature electoral democracy" to its longstanding electoral techniques, even where those techniques have been shown to be less representative than the demands of legitimacy might be said to allow.

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This is not to say that Slovakia or Hungary are perfect places. It is to say that many Central and Eastern Europeans have learned from their own experience with artificially or militaristically imposed silence. They now perceive a world of difference between the technical act of holding elections and the art of governing in a multi-ethnic society; between calling oneself a democracy and the work necessary to cultivate a civil tradition of political society; between the appearance and customs of an overarching national identity, on the one hand, and the importance of recognizing rather than submerging ethnic groups on the other. These lessons about *not* submerging differences are worlds apart from the lessons we ascribe to them. Indeed, rather than respond to a fear of difference with coerced silence, they struggle with election rules that recognize difference but emphasize inclusion. Indeed, it is because they *finally* recognize the need to include minority groups in their government *in order to be legitimate democratic nation states* that most of these countries have adopted proportional or semi-proportional election systems of the sort I proposed.

Moreover, by contrast to balkanist separatism, dissatisfied minority groups in America are clamoring for inclusion, not separation; they want in, not out. Even many black nationalists claim reparations in the form of forty acres and a mule, not a return ticket to a lost homeland.

True, when black voices are pushed back and their claims ignored, trumped by denial and silence, talk about race may become talk of separate space. But such talk is mainly talk, made more powerful and threatening by the media attention it generates. That attention highlights the "alien" quality of black life rather than its American quality, and it reinforces the political isolation that many blacks, even in Plotke's calculus, already feel.

This suggests the basic problem with Plotke's racial aversion strategy. Those who repeatedly lose in a winner-take-all system have no incentive to continue to play the game. A politics of always losing is a politics of a passive electorate. A strategy in which white progressives tolerate the continuous isolation of black coalition partners paralyzes blacks and tongue-ties whites. Americans of all hues respond to the fact that they are objects not subjects by simply staying home.

Another problem with racial silence entails two distinct but related phenomena. Plotke suggests talking in code as a way of hiding the racial dimension. Those running to Plotke's right practice talking in code as a way of *highlighting* race, albeit on the sly.

So while Plotke may seek to encode his message in the language of universal reform, the other party attacks that very message in the language of race. Welfare reform, crime, immigration, all become racialized or "blackened" to the advantage of those doing the scapegoating. Being silent may feel more racially tolerant, but it amounts to the same thing: a conversation about race in which we never use the "r" word. In that conversation, the forces of silence cede all the space to the forces of bigotry. Those who play offense, who are less ambiguous and offer clearer sounding explanations of real people's problems, unfortunately prevail. The clarity of their message is informed by their winking use of racial signals.

Plotke understands this in the abstract. But he objects to remedies that might enhance the political efficacy of minority representatives. He couches his objection as an argument against false symmetry, as if race-neutral proposals like cumulative voting and supermajority rules merely compensate blacks for things whites did to exclude them. Here, he completely misses the point.

Discrimination is a window on larger societal unfairness. The importance of remedying winner-take-all elections or racially polarized politics is that hypermajoritarian and adversarial forms of representation disable all American voters, not just blacks.[7] Exaggerating the power of geographic majorities, inviting incumbents to assemble constituents in safe seats (so that candidates pick like-minded voters rather than voters choosing like-minded representatives), and encouraging up or down votes in which those who win get all the power and those who lose get nothing: all this demobilizes the electorate generally. Turnout in winner-take-all elections in the United States is lower than in those West-

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ern, Central, and Eastern European democracies that use versions of proportional representation.

In my work, therefore, I make three claims. First, racial inclusion legitimates democratic politics. Blacks should vote, get elected, and be an *influential* part of governing majorities. The experience of perpetual losers or losers who are only nominally represented by others is alienating and destabilizing. Second, the experience of engaging with the problems of the black community can be politically inclusive. In political context, "race" can become code for a deliberative and participatory politics of new ideas.[8] In particular, seeking to solve examples of racial discrimination can be the thin end of the wedge—finding race-neutral electoral systems that include those who have been excluded can become the basis for a new kind of politics in which all voters' votes count and in which all voters vote for someone who can get elected. This is, again, "one vote-one value" or the principle of "taking turns." Both of these winner-take-only-*some* principles are behind my discussions of cumulative voting and supermajority rules.

Finally, in absolute contravention of Plotke's claims, I advocate election alternatives because I believe in more democracy, not less; more conversation, not less; more involvement of ordinary people and less reliance on professional politicians or experts; more acknowledgment that progressive change depends upon eliminating hierarchy and rebuilding bottom up, strengthening the weakest links in the social, political, and economic chain.

Blacks function as the miner's canary—the fragile bird that suffocates first from the poisoned gas in the metaphorical mines. Plotke urges us not to speak of "canary rights." He may have a point about the polarized nature of discourse based primarily on special interests or identity politics, but the solution is not to ignore the canary's signals. Rather, we must use the experience of the canary as a warning to assess the conditions of the mines more generally. Urging blacks to settle for watered-down representation or lesser-of-two-evils voting is an across-the-board recipe for declining voter turnout and voter trust in politicians and government.

In sum, I, too, have a dream. I imagine David Plotke returning to Hungary with his visual artifacts. But this time he shows the students pictures of the actual conditions so many poor white, black, brown, and yellow people face in America and asks, "What color is this?" And the students' answers teach him something of lasting value about the importance of changing material conditions through democratic means. This probably means incorporating some form of proportional representation to assure electoral inclusion and broad-based democratic legitimacy. And maybe, just maybe, I imagine elections in America in which, like many of the emerging European democracies, more people vote than stay home, and the use of their vote creates a politics of accountability rather than re-electability.

I'm dreaming, I know. For now.

Notes

[1] I do not discount the tremendous progress we have made. Yet, even today, I believe that "race remains a central factor in people's lives." That phrase is not mine but Vernon Jordan's, who, in a recent speech observed, "We often seem to suffer from a collective amnesia....We want to think of ourselves as a color-blind society, but racial stereotyping is pervasive and race remains a central factor in people's lives."

[2] See, for example, David Strauss, "The Myth of Colorblindness," *Supreme Court Review* (1986). The day Toni Morrison learned she won the Nobel prize for literature, a Swedish radio reporter asked whether she now felt more optimistic about race relations in America. "No," she said without a second thought. "Black people have become the way in which we talk about poor people," which makes conversations about race "hidden and covert."

[3] Rather than recite the legions of consistent statistical and anecdotal data here, I merely refer the reader to several excellent works, including Michael Dawson's *Behind the Mule*, Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton's *American Apartheid*, and Andrew Hacker's *Two Nations*. While there are many and various "black communities," "the ubiquitous experience of racism provides the basis for group solidarity," even as "differences of gender, class, geography, and political affiliations keep blacks apart." See Regina Austin, "The Black Community," 65 *S.Cal. L. Rev.* 1768, 1817 (1992).

[4] See *The Tyranny of the Majority: Fundamental Fairness*

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in Representative Democracy (Free Press, 1994). Representation is awarded based on the way black voters vote, not on the way they look or associate outside the voting booth.

[5] Since numerically weak but politically intense groups can gain electoral representation, proportional and semiproportional systems provide incentives for local, grassroots organizations to educate voters and sustain voter mobilization. Nondistricted election rules enable multiple, minor parties to participate and prevail. They may also lessen incentives for negative campaigning, promote voter turnout generally by making electoral campaigns more competitive, and help shift the emphasis from individual, professional politicians to interest-based coalitions and local organizations.

[6] See, for example, Jane Perlez, "Hungarians Rally to Cry of Old Party," *New York Times*, July 29, 1995, at A2 (quoting Jozsef Torgyan, leader of the Hungarians whose priests must obey the language laws in other countries: "A Hungarian priest, whose ancestors have lived in the same place for 1,000 years, must obey the Slovak fascist language law, which says he must give his sermon in Slovak even though his community doesn't speak Slovak."). See also Michael R. Geroe and Thomas K. Gump, "Hungary and a New Paradigm for the Protection of Ethnic Minorities in Central and Eastern Europe," 32 *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law* 673, 681-701 (1995) (documenting a historic pattern of limiting use of minority languages, denying ethnic minorities the right to assemble for social, cultural, or political purposes, and fracturing the geographic regions inhabited by ethnic minorities to dilute their political power).

[7] Contrary to Plotke's analysis, I argue that cumulative voting and supermajority (minority veto) rules are arrangements that foster representation of black political interests in ways that promote more inclusive, accurate and politically open representation and debate *across racial lines*. See, for example, *The Tyranny of the Majority,* pp. 16-18; pp. 98-101; pp. 155-56.

[8] See Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres, *Race, Representation and the U.S. Experience: The Uses of Political Synecdoche* (unpublished manuscript June 1995); Anne Phillips, "Descriptive Representation Revisited: Addressing the social composition of the legislative assembly," paper delivered at the Conference on Political Parties and Representation, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary, June 16-17, 1995, p.14.

David Plotke Replies

The main points of Lani Guinier's essay deserve vigorous assent and criticism. She links debates about racial justice with arguments about representation in ways that are theoretically powerful and ambitiously democratic. Guinier wants blacks to gain a fuller and more significant political role, and for overall political participation and democratic dialogue to increase. I share these goals but doubt her proposals will be effective in attaining them. I address three questions: Should we talk about race? Is it fair to lose? Do we need more proportional representation now?

Should We Talk about Race?

Guinier says that my article is a plea for avoiding discussion of race on grounds that such talk will endanger centrist coalitions. Here is what I meant to say. Clinton's desire not to talk about race caused him to withdraw his support of Guinier's nomination when it became clear to him that a significant part of his presidential coalition opposed it. These forces, mainly center and center-right Democrats, oppose racial preferences in public policy. They view even invitations to talk about race as strategies for implementing such preferences.

This dynamic puts proponents of racial equity in a difficult position. They (we) face great difficulty in reopening or trying to change the conversation about race at the level of national politics unless we can begin it with proposals that promise to be effective in increasing racial equity without entailing racial polarization. This is unfair, in the sense that it should always be politically acceptable to talk about unjust inequalities without having a compelling and elaborated program to overcome them. But it is a real political situation. It greatly disadvantages those who urge that a conversation about race be a prominent part of national politics, without having proposals that meet such stringent criteria. In light of this view of the shape of national political argument I examined some of Guinier's proposals. I argued that they are unlikely to spur the conversation she rightly believes ought to occur.

I draw two conclusions. People who are interested in racial justice should continue to talk

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about race and seek to create and improve (procedural and other) proposals that might be workable. And we should not be surprised if efforts to place racial questions prominently in national political debates are resisted by center Democrats who believe they have little to gain from doing that.

Is It Fair to Lose?

Guinier believes that in a genuinely democratic polity all political forces gain a fair share of victories. I think this is not so, or at least not so by design. Political forces deserve to be heard, respected, and to have every chance to compete openly. Guinier says, "Blacks should vote, get elected, and be *an influential* part of governing majorities." If this means it would be a good thing for blacks to win political victories, I agree. But her statement in context also sounds like a distributive claim. If one substitutes labor for blacks in her quote, the problem is clearer: We don't expect political victories to be distributed at all. We expect that in fair conditions political results will be due to organizational skills, persuasiveness, and the merit of arguments.

But what if fair conditions are corrupted by racism? What if a political group's proposals are always defeated, and *the reason* is that others dislike or want to oppress the social group to which that political group is linked? On the whole blacks in the United States do not now suffer this condition, though they did long into this century.

There are still, however, major cases where racial antagonism permeates and frames debate, as in the increasingly awful argument about social welfare. Yet blacks now lose politically mainly because they have left-of-center political ideas that are unpopular. Take a congressional district with a racial composition roughly equal to the national figures. Imagine that in a normal campaign for Congress, a white left-liberal will lose to a right-center Republican by 60 percent to 40 percent. Substitute a black left-liberal for the white left-liberal. We could expect the black candidate to lose another 5 percent or so of the vote, from the right side of the Democratic coalition. Sometimes the prospect of such losses is enough to mean that black candidates aren't selected to run in races that are expected to be close. This situation puts a large burden on black politicians, and illustrates what I described as "slowly diminishing racial domination."

My effort to find the right word for racial inequality today was aimed at capturing such situations—when a black candidate loses, and part of the reason for the loss is purely racial, but the main reason is the public's rejection of the political views of that candidate. The left's phrases about racism in disguise suggest that routine political outcomes are primarily motivated by efforts at racial exclusion. I do not think that racial antagonism now plays this central role. If racism—refusal to acknowledge the basic political standing of blacks and refusal to listen—were the primary source of political outcomes, that would be a good reason to rearrange procedures in order to change outcomes.

If we took twenty major legislative proposals identified with leaders of the Congressional Black Caucus in the last few years and followed their course, we would find few clearcut victories. I doubt that Guinier thinks the main reason for this outcome is racial antagonism to Ron Dellums or John Conyers (though I am sure that some representatives would be more comfortable in a whiter Congress that reminded them of home in the newer suburbs and the rural West). I do not read Guinier's essay here or her other articles to claim that racism is now the primary direct cause of black electoral or political losses.

Perhaps distinctions among forms and degrees of domination are not so important for Guinier because she thinks political representation should be substantially organized by group whether or not race is the issue.* This idea depends on viewing political groups and social groups as so closely linked as to be equivalent. If political proposals are really claims by social groups, almost by definition fairness means the same thing with regard to both. Political forces are often based partly on social groups, but there is always a separation between them, due to the

*See Lani Guinier, "Comment: [E]racing Democracy," *Harvard Law Review* (vol. 108, Nov. 1994), pp. 109-136.

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diversity and fluidity of the social order and the requirement in politics that even narrow interest group proposals be made in general terms. Thus fairness means somewhat different things for social groups and political groups. Perhaps Guinier's belief that politics equals (social) group interaction leads her not to see any significant distinction between the political rejection of views articulated by black political agents and the racial rejection of those views because they are proposed by people who are socially defined as blacks.

The present shape of American politics also makes me unenthusiastic about Guinier's tendency to treat political victories like distributive shares for groups. If the political spectrum went no further to the right than Christine Todd Whitman, the practical results of such an approach might not be much worse than what we now have. But for the foreseeable future, the line of claimants under Guinier's approach would reach far to the right and mean giving shares out to groups that I would prefer to see defeated over and over again. In my article I urged that we consider not only the best possible effects of our proposals on our friends and allies, but imagine how they might interact with overall political configurations. What is the rule that warrants making sure that black political forces win a fair number of times but not anti-abortion forces or anti-immigration forces? I can't think of such a rule that would meet minimal criteria of procedural neutrality. Anti-abortion forces and their defenders, for example, make arguments similar to Guinier's—when majorities continually reject their program they claim that this result is an undemocratic exclusion of a large group. My response is, "If you so dislike losing, change your ideas and see if you do better." Part of a democratic process is the possibility of strongly opposing certain views and wanting to help defeat them.

If it could be shown that my desire to defeat anti-choice political projects were really a social prejudice, then my effort to do so should be regarded as illegitimate. Some anti-abortion Catholics have responded to the opening created by the view that equity means fair political shares by claiming that opposition to their views on abortion expresses anti-Catholic prejudice. This claim is wrong. Catholics who accept their church's position can enter politics and act on behalf of their understanding of the social needs and religious commitments of Catholics. As compromise is not the only political virtue, I see no compelling democratic reason to give their destructive political program about gender and sexuality a fair share of victories *if this can be prevented in open debate and by fair means*. The damage done by their policies would outweigh my inclination to be neighborly (as if I were to say to my Catholic neighbors, "If it will make you feel better and make our political community a warmer place, it's your turn to decide on abortion law").

Do We Need More Proportional Representation Now?

Guinier is right to insist that electoral procedures are not sacred, and many local formulas are compatible with an overall regime that is democratic. Measures aimed at increasing the number of blacks in public office are in principle legitimate in the contemporary United States (including the odd-looking congressional districts). But Guinier's proposed procedural changes are less promising than she thinks, including proportional representation (PR).

The main beneficiary of proportional representation is usually the largest cohesive political minority. Groups also benefit whose size is just above the threshold set for representation. Thus PR generally expands the range of political argument, as the forces near the edges of the current political spectrum are usually small. PR allows some of them to gain a public role: it won't ensure their influence, much less victories on major issues.

I agree with Guinier's comments insofar as a democratic system with no PR elements will be insensitive to political minorities. A number of local procedures with PR elements might enhance democratic practices. But what would adding a large dose of PR to American national politics do right now? How would it affect prospects for racial equity?

In practice we are not really in a pure majority,

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winner-take-all system. Several features of current American politics informally play the roles PR is meant to play, including federalism and political decentralization. More dramatically, the expansion of the primary system in the two parties has much increased chances for political minorities to have real influence. No one can keep them out of the process or hide intraparty fights. Pat Buchanan, Jesse Jackson, and other noncentrist types and the forces they represent can become real forces in national political life. That is one reason why center and center-right Democrats don't much like primaries. While I agree with Guinier that some PR is better than none, and local change in this direction might often be good, we are not starting from zero. I don't see much reason to think that adopting something like full national PR would have strikingly democratic effects in racial politics or in general. My estimate is that the following political configuration would appear if the threshold for getting seats in a new Congress were 5 percent: left party, 3-5 percent; black party, 5-10 percent; center-left party, 30-35 percent; independent center party, 5 percent; right-center party, 35-40 percent; Christian right party, 10-15 percent*.

As often with PR, the big winner is the largest cohesive minority, in this case the right-center party. In a multiparty system 40 percent is often enough for a parliamentary majority, as most PR formulas try to compensate for the dispersing effects of a small threshold by allocating seats in a way that favors larger parties. Even without this feature, the right-center party would be in a good position to build winning coalitions with parties to its right and left. One secondary winner might be a small centrist party, a descendant of liberal Republicanism or Democratic neoliberalism. A small far left party (workerist, green, or maybe feminist) might appear.

PR would probably not much help two groups, which have in common that they are relatively small, visible in national politics, and now highly partisan. The Christian right, to the relief of the Robert Doles and Pete Wilsons, could muster its troops separately, while remaining available to a right-center ruling party as a partner in coalitions. A distinct black party would probably also emerge and gain a real following among blacks and a small one among other groups.

In this situation political differences among blacks would be amplified. Some black voters—probably a small number—would support a far left party. Some would sign up for a right-center party. The remaining black voters (say, 8 percent to 9 percent of the national vote) would probably divide between a black party and a center-left party. The overall alignment might not be worse than the present one, but it doesn't shine with democratic promise or signal racial equity. It might not look much different from the 1995 House, and the black party would have fewer representatives than the current Black Caucus.

There are procedural elements in contemporary racial inequities, and they need attention. Beyond my criticisms of Guinier's specific proposals, my point is that racial inequities are less based on procedural unfairness than she believes. She thinks that more inclusive procedures would increase black political representation, increase the number of significant victories by those representatives, and improve the quality of political deliberation. She interprets my reservations about this story as reticence to talk about race. I think her account leaves out a big part of the reason why blacks' long-blocked entry into political life is now accompanied by so much losing. Most blacks support political programs and ideas that are now clearly in a losing area of the American political spectrum. Blacks have gained relatively full entry into American politics in decades when national politics has moved well to the right.

After mass-production industries peaked as centers of American economic growth, blacks got to be factory workers. After decades of suburban growth and urban decline, blacks got to be mayors. Now, blacks get to be a large part and often the leaders of the legitimate national American left—after the decline of the left movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the dwindling of trade unions, and the decay or collapse of diverse left-of-center projects in the United States and elsewhere. It is not surprising if this seems like a poor reward for the decades of difficult work it took to overcome the main forms of racial exclusion from politics.

□

* I simplify in leaving out possible regional parties and parties based on ethnic and racial groups other than blacks.

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Frederick Crews

FREUD'S TIME HAS PASSED

Eugene Goodheart is a fine literary critic, but in "Freud on Trial" (Spring 1995) he fails to establish that Freud's undoubted "suggestiveness" and "persuasiveness" are grounds for his permanent value as a psychological thinker. As Goodheart says, the fact that Freud has served our century as a major "founder of discursivity" needs to be explained. But a sound explanation, such as Ernest Gellner's thoughtful and complex one in *The Psychoanalytic Movement, or The Coming of Unreason* (1985)—won't necessarily require our continued enthrallment to such debatable notions as repression and the Oedipus complex. Indeed, only when we have grasped (as Gellner does) the gratuitousness of those and other Freudian dogmas can we transcend Whiggish smugness and perceive (as Goodheart doesn't) the full scope of the problem. If Freud has "influenced" us without the benefit of being right in his mental lawgiving, attention must shift from the absolute appeal of his ideas to the modern cultural needs and expectations they have served.

One inconvenience in Goodheart's argument is that Freud is becoming less persuasive with every passing year. Even Goodheart chokes, for example, on the arrogant tails-you-lose logic of Freudian "resistance," which allows interpretive folly an unchecked license. Yet Goodheart wants to remove such concepts from the reach of scientific criticism, appealing instead to spongily supportive categories like "the power of narration," "the company of the great masters of modern literature," and the "emotional recognition of the truth of an interpretation" as it is reflected in "the confirming response of the analysand."

Goodheart's weakness for this last form of corroboration demonstrates that he has learned nothing from Adolf Grünbaum, whom he imprudently enlists as a champion of Freud's "extraordinary suggestiveness." In a word, clients in every form of therapy amply "confirm" their doctors' illusions. But Goodheart's other cited means of confirmation are no stronger. Freud's formidable narrative power argues for his place not among discoverers of truth but, obviously, among fellow storytellers. And the resonance of Freud's ideas with modern literature only reminds us that, while cunningly posing as a mere clinical drudge, Freud steeped himself in late-Romantic literary culture and brilliantly transmuted its preoccupations into "science."

Goodheart is most confused of all, however, when he seeks to shield psychoanalysis behind "interpretation," an activity that "is not scientific explanation" and is therefore subject to criticism only when insistence is laid on "a particular interpretation, rather than the activity of interpretation itself." This is almost too murky to unpack, but one point stands out: Goodheart has confounded the interpretive activity inside a given analysis with the formulation and justification of ambitious psychoanalytic tenets. Freud's propositions fall squarely within the domain of psychology, and no amount of interpreting that employs those propositions can exempt them from the scrutiny awaiting every psychological system—even if its founder should turn out to have status as "the commanding figure of our culture."

Finally, Goodheart's remarks about me personally are all erroneous or beg the question. I have not hidden my "evolution from champion of psychoanalysis to implacable adversary" but have frequently recounted it in print. I have "taken into consideration," again in print, all of the issues that Goodheart accuses me of evading. And when he character-

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izes my criticism of Freud as parricidal, he is putting into play the very habit of Oedipal reductionism that I, among others, have called into question. Ordinarily a fair and careful thinker, Goodheart in this essay has played the ad hominem card: if Crews is driven by "iconoclasm" and "the animus of a resentful renegade," his arguments can be dismissed out of hand. I would respectfully suggest to Goodheart, whom I have never met, that he knows nothing whatever about my motives, just as I know nothing of his in belittling my efforts to tell the truth about Freud and psychoanalysis.

Eugene Goodheart Replies

I am surprised that Frederick Crews acknowledges Freud's suggestiveness and persuasiveness and his brilliant transmutation of late-Romantic literary culture into "science," for nothing in his article "The Unknown Freud" (*New York Review of Books*, November 18, 1993) grants Freud's work any value. He asks us to completely dismiss Freud's ideas about the Oedipus complex, repression, and resistance. He disparages Freud as a storyteller whose stories have no relation to the truth of our psychological experience. Nothing is left in the wake of his all-out assault.

I agree with Crews that Freud's work doesn't meet contemporary standards of scientific achievement. The same could be said for the work of Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Tocqueville. Truth is not the exclusive property of science, so it doesn't follow that Freud's narrative power and theoretical gifts can't be the source of truths. Moreover, I would like to know what Crews understands to be scientific truth and its "permanent value." In a recent seminar the historian of science Frank Sulloway, who is also critical of Freud's scientific status, admitted that there were no stable truths in science, which was best understood as a process of testing. The question of what is truth and where it is to be found is more difficult than Crews's easy scientism recognizes. My view of Freud's scientific status is well expressed by Jacques Bouveresse in *Wittgenstein Reads Freud: The Myth of the Unconscious*, a book Crews admires: "What is not so clear is how [Wittgenstein] might determine whether a scientific treatment of the phenomena concerned is possible and under what conditions, or whether, as some would have it, psychoanalysis may not be scientific, but nonetheless constitutes the most scientific, or at any rate the most convincing thing we have, given the nature of the phenomena in question."

Crews says I confuse interpretation as an activity "inside a given analysis" with the theoretical "formulation and justification. . .of psychoanalytic tenets." (If there is confusion, I share it with Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas.) I fail to see why interpretation cannot apply to both activities. Nor do I see why my distinction between a particular interpretation and the activity of interpretation is murky. If we think of science as a process rather than the embodiment of particular truths that may be superseded, we can regard interpretation as an activity whose value does not depend on a set of particular interpretations it produces. Incidentally, I don't say that the activity of interpretation is beyond criticism. I explicitly say that it has its limits and is subject to criticism.

I don't uncritically endorse the concept of the confirming response of the analysand, as Crews claims. I acknowledge in my essay the potential coerciveness of the analyst. I do think Crews's view that every confirmation by an analysand of an interpretation by an analyst is merely an abject assent to the "doctor's illusions" implausible. How does the doctor (*every* doctor!) acquire such power that the patient inevitably submits? And if the doctor has such power, why do certain patients resist to the end? Again Crews's all-or-nothing view undermines or at least seriously compromises the value of what he has to say.

If *all* confirming responses are not equally trustworthy, *all* resistances to interpretation are not to be viewed with suspicion as a sign of repression. I am critical of Freud's imperial view that every "no" conceals a "yes," what Crews

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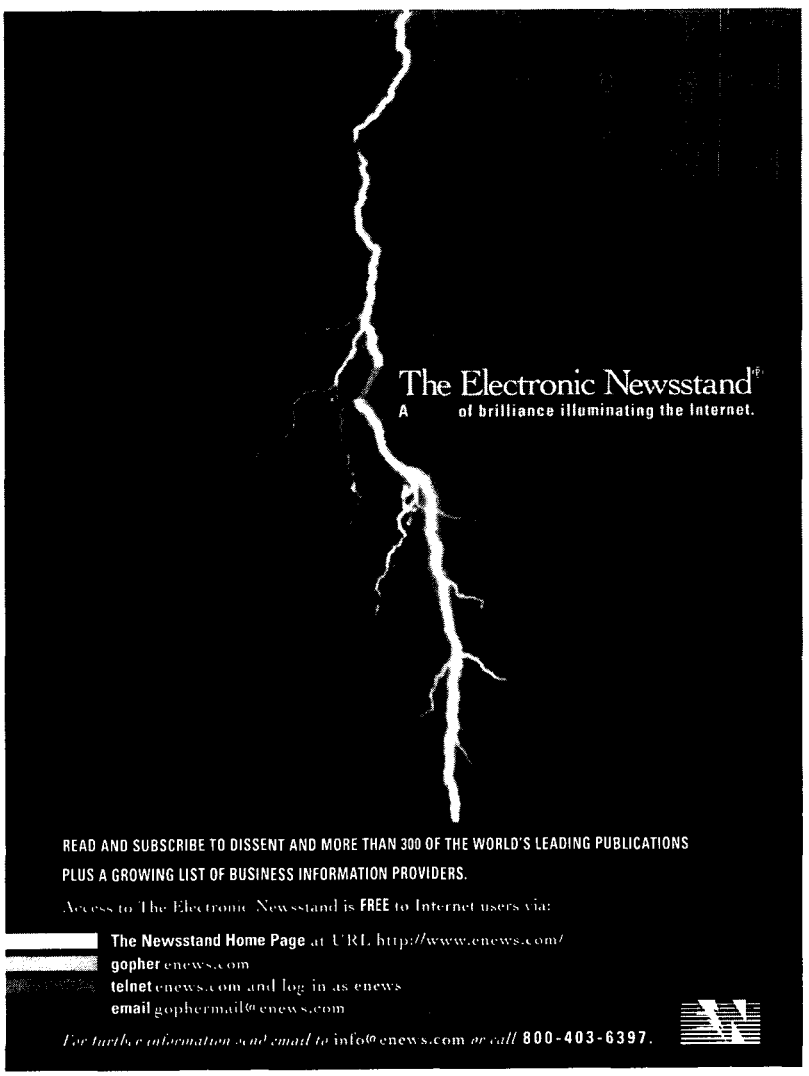
characterizes as "the arrogant tails-you-lose logic of Freudian resistance." Crews has me choking on this logic. I was aware of breathing calmly while conducting the critique. Nowhere do I suggest that "such concepts" as the doctrine of resistance should be removed "from the reach of scientific criticism." I criticized the imperial version of the doctrine of resistance unequivocally and made no effort to shield or protect it. Crews exaggerates greatly when he says I enlist Grünbaum as a *champion* of Freud's extraordinary suggestiveness. All I say is that he acknowledges Freud's heuristic power, and I speculate that Grünbaum's long devotion to a critical study of Freud's work might reflect its extraordinary suggestiveness.

The phrase "animus of a resentful renegade" arose from an impression that Crews's excessively fierce and relentless manner made on me. It is true that I know nothing of his motives. If Crews has given an account of his evolution elsewhere, I am at fault for not noting it. Finally, I should say that I have always admired Crews's work as a literary critic and find it strange that in my first public exchange with him we should find ourselves so at odds. □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Benjamin Ross

BUREAUCRACY AND MARKETS

Lessons from the Fall of Communism

Perhaps the most interesting economic thinking of recent years has come out of the effort to understand the collapse of communism. And the implications of this thinking are far removed from the simplistic market worship that so many, in East and West alike, have taken up to replace shattered preconceptions.

Serious students of communist economics have focused on elucidating the mechanism of central planning. In neither its Stalinist nor its Brezhnevite variety, they find, did the planning mechanism represent a rational allocation of resources according to economic criteria. Rather, it was a system of bureaucratic bargaining that reconciled arbitrary directives from the top with the needs and desires of individual enterprises. The shift of power over the years from the top downward into the bureaucratic apparatus was a key element in the system's stagnation and eventual collapse.

One of the most striking lessons from detailed observation of centrally administered economies is the persistence of the individual enterprise's pursuit of its own interests in the context of a system supposedly designed to discourage self-seeking. Like a market, the communist "planning" apparatus is best understood as a mechanism by which the self-interested actions of many entities aggregated to define the behavior of the society as a whole.

The implications of this finding go far beyond the study of communism and require a rethinking of market economies as well. Plan-and-market, counterposed for more than a century by both friends and enemies of capitalism, seems clearly to be a false dichotomy. The real options are market and administrative coordination of economic activity, with any viable system having considerable elements of both. And, since both market and bureaucracy are mechanisms of coordination, economic success requires that both be organized so as to create incentives for independent economic actors to behave in ways that contribute to overall well-being.

From this point of view, neither markets nor bureaucracies can be taken for granted—both must be understood as the products of particular circumstances and power relations. And economics cannot limit itself to the analysis of markets. It must study the internal workings of complex organizations that carry out economic functions, and then must investigate how the structures of markets and organizations are determined.

Two Examples

As readers of *Dissent* need not be reminded, the recent growth of income inequality in the United States is not a natural process of adjustment to change. It arises from the response to new circumstances of a labor market whose rules are determined through political and economic struggle between workers and owners. In the same way, the environmental devastation of Eastern Europe cannot be ascribed to central control in the abstract. It grew out of particular features of communist society, such as overemphasis on military production and excessive secrecy, which reflected the autocracy's compulsion to protect and enlarge its political power. Both market and nonmarket institutions of economic coordination must be analyzed to uncover the social forces that determine supposedly objective rules.

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A segment of the American economy in which the linkage of market and nonmarket coordination is especially conspicuous is land development. The system of land-use "planning" and allocation in the United States is ripe for demystification by the same methods that have been applied to "planning" in Eastern Europe. The topic is as important for politics as for economics, because land use is among the few fields of activity in which local governments have retained autonomy in the face of the nationalization of politics and the internationalization of the economy. Local political struggles routinely pit profit-seeking developers against homeowners who want as few neighbors as possible. These battles have made land development a defining issue in grassroots politics, with a significance that extends to the national scene.

Land development is governed by a system of local zoning or "land-use planning" that limits the kind and amount of building allowed on private land. The plans, adopted by local legislative bodies with advice from professionals, ostensibly are aimed at ensuring that development is coordinated so as to yield socially optimal results. Development proposals generally must pass a series of administrative hurdles aimed at ensuring their conformity with the plan.

In reality, of course, local land-use controls are more an arena for political conflict than a system of rational optimization. The American mania for green lawns and rich neighbors, abetted by racial prejudice and real and imaginary fears of city life, drives affluent suburbanites to try to stop almost any new building that might enter their surroundings. Even churches are no longer welcome in some suburbs. Opponents use administrative challenges, lawsuits, and political pressure to obstruct projects they don't want. Developers fight back with promises of economic bounty, with lawyers, and with political influence cultivated by the legal and illegal distribution of cash.

As with communist planning, the results of American land-use planning are often determined less by its ostensible objectives than by the political and administrative functioning of the planning mechanism. That developers can get their way by buying local politicians, although often true, is not the main point; the matter is more subtle. Local opposition rarely leads elected officials simply to vote to stop a development project. Legal doctrines providing that governments may not arbitrarily interfere with private property but may only pass rules of general application promote adjudication by unelected administrative boards and by the courts. The opposition to development expresses itself most effectively as a frictional force, raising objections, calling hearings, forcing delays, and instigating lawsuits.

The developer, in this system, must weigh the potential profits from a new project against the costs of overcoming frictional resistance and the risk of failure to do so. The consequences are often the opposite of those the planners intended. Development is driven into areas where there are no opponents, promoting soulless and ecologically harmful suburban sprawl. What development does occur in built-up areas tends toward gigantism, because only the largest projects can generate sufficient profits to overcome the fixed costs of the approval process. Planning agencies, seeing the resulting damage, propose ever more elaborate mechanisms to direct development into more beneficial channels. But the increasing complexity of these arrangements only strengthens the drag exerted by frictional resistance, with the paradoxical result of ever greater tendencies toward gigantism and sprawl.

A similar analysis can be applied to health care. Like land development, markets for medical services are inextricably linked to state action and cannot be understood without examining the political as well as the economic interactions among consumers, providers, and state administration. The very existence of a market for medical care is politically determined and is largely a development of the last few decades. Not long ago, health care was provided primarily by nonprofit hospitals and by individual doctors whose income was little affected by competitive forces.

As Rashi Fein has pointed out, a basic assumption underlying theories of economic competition does not apply to medicine. In theory, buyers enter markets to obtain what they want

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on the most advantageous terms available. The interaction of these buyers with sellers trying to maximize their earnings results in an efficient allocation of resources. But patients enter the medical care marketplace without knowing what they want to buy. The doctor tells them whether they need an appendectomy or an antacid. In other words, in this market the seller and not the buyer determines the demand.

Incompatibility between the nature of medical care and the market form of organization lies at the root of the inflation in health care costs that is now our major problem in public finance. Efforts to control these costs have tried to use market forces rather than confronting this incompatibility head-on by setting budgets for health care expenditures. As with Soviet reforms of consumer-goods industries that ignored the basic problem of making producers respond directly to consumer demand, many of these "reforms" only replaced one perverse incentive with another.

One such reform, initiated by federal law, has been the creation of profit-making health maintenance organizations (HMOs). The theory was that these organizations, competing for patients who pay a fixed annual fee for all their health care, would have an incentive to provide good care efficiently. In reality, these organizations have acted like the Soviet shoe factories that found that quotas for shoe production could be met most efficiently by producing only small sizes. For the HMOs, it is much easier to lower per-patient medical costs by enrolling healthy patients than by treating sick ones more efficiently. So they use discriminatory pricing where the laws allow it, and targeted marketing where they do not, to seek out the young and healthy.

The HMO system has a predictable dynamic leading from revolution to sclerosis. New health-care organizations have lower costs, not through efficiency, but because they have fewer sick people running up bills. Today, profit-making HMOs can offer lower premiums than nonprofit organizations with more scruples and an older, sicker membership. Established nonprofits find it hard to compete, and some, like Washington's Group Health Association, have collapsed under the pressure. When the population insured by for-profit organizations ages, these organizations in turn will become vulnerable to yet newer competitors. But it's easy to foresee that big-business HMOs will—if they can't jettison their sick enrollees—get the government to change the rules of the game before they themselves go under.

One could analyze other parts of the American economy in much the same way. Such industries as television, aviation, and telecommunications owe their very existence to manifestly artificial government-defined rules. The role of private business interests in these and other markets is not a given, but something that is determined by history, culture, law, and the conscious and unconscious decisions of our elected representatives.

American liberals have too often shared the unexamined conservative assumption that markets are natural and immutable. The liberal version of this faith expresses itself in the will to solve problems piecemeal with regulations and bureaucratic programs. Ever more complicated schemes are hatched to reconcile corporate interests with social needs, with little heed paid to

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the costs and unintended consequences of bureaucracy and complexity. This process reached its apotheosis in the Clinton health care program. Surely the American people were not all wrong—however much their mistrust was artificially inflamed—when they rebelled at the byzantine structures devised by Clinton's brain trust.

The point here is not to join in the current mania for unthinking deregulation. The results of decontrolling land use and health care would be even worse than what we see now. (Compare carefully planned suburbs with those where controls are lax, and imagine the unconstrained behavior of health-care behemoths!) Rather, it is that economic structures must be viewed as a whole, taking into account the interactions of political, bureaucratic, and market forces.

The cost of reformers' compromise with corporate interests is not just the incomplete attainment of goals; it is also the added burden of bureaucracy and inertia created by excessively complex institutions. The case for single-payer health care, after all, was not only a matter of justice; it was a question of economic efficiency as well. Structural change is a far better remedy for economic unfairness than the creation of bureaucratic obstacles to the existing structures' efforts to get things done.

The study of communism reveals that the administrative apparatus of "planning" must be understood as an arena for the clash of interests rather than a mechanism that automatically performs assigned tasks. We misconstrue the lesson of that system's collapse unless we analyze the legal and organizational structures of capitalist markets in the same way. It will not do, if it ever did, to create a new bureaucracy in response to every problem. Reformers must analyze economic mechanisms in their entirety, and must alter them in the direction of efficiency as well as fairness. □

Cynthia Fuchs Epstein

PISTOL-PACKING MAMAS

Nancy Reagan had one next to the bed, and before you know it, Barbie's wardrobe may include one. The pearl-handled hairbrush on the dressing table of American women may soon be joined by a pearl-handled revolver.

Even more important than the fact of gun ownership by women is the gun imagery in the minds and hearts of some American women legislators. The gender gap that many feminists believed was to help us achieve a kinder, gentler government has considerably narrowed. A clear majority of white women (55 percent) voted for Republican congressional candidates in the 1992 election. One of them, Helen Chenoweth of Idaho (described as a soft-voiced grandmother by the *Wall Street Journal*), symbolically displays a stick of dynamite alongside the "Contract With America" that she and a number of first-time women members of Congress support. Chenoweth and Representative Linda Smith of Washington have stated that they have met with militia representatives, whose membership includes a good percentage of women. In Idaho, for example, of the state's five hundred militia activists, one-third are women.

The National Rifle Association (NRA) is plunging ahead with a lobbying effort to persuade women in Middle America to become pistol-packing mamas, according to another *Wall Street Journal* article.

The rationale of the campaign is that gun ownership empowers women. To some, the NRA may seem like a strange group to promote this cause, but women are surfacing in the leadership of the 3.5 million member organization, including its first woman president, Marian P. Hammer, and its top lobbyist, a Smith College graduate named Tanya Metaksa, who operates a computer exchange with the catchy name of

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"Bullet'N Board." Campaign rhetoric urges women to fight crime firsthand: "Refuse to Be a Victim."

One can well understand that this argument might appeal to women whose viewing of prime-time television drama highlights their victim role. But even more, one can appreciate how learning to use a firearm in one of those gun-harboring households can give women a sense of power—an equal footing.

My own puny experience handling a gun a few years ago offered me an insight. I had a student who was an F.B.I. agent. On a whim I asked her if I could hold her pistol. After dutifully unloading the bullets she handed it to me. Putting my finger on the trigger did give me a powerful feeling; for a moment I felt transformed from effete intellectual to the "Wonder Woman" hero of my comic book reading years. Good sense returned as I handed back the gun.

Gun sellers complain that there are no big bucks to be made yet from women, and the NRA reports that "*only*" 15 to 20 percent of their members are women. But empowerment is in the air. As Americans are persuaded by Contract-With-America Republicans that they cannot depend on government to do anything right, women as well as men may be ever more oriented toward a "do it yourself" mode of protection. It might not take long before they seize the ideas of the feminist movement and plan a "Take Our Daughters to the Firing Range Day." □

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Locarno II

The second annual Locarno Conference on Politics and Society was held this past May at the Biblioteca Cantonale in Locarno, Switzerland. The conference brings together *Dissent* editors and writers with our European counterparts—this year with editors of *Esprit* (Paris) and *Reset* (Rome) and with other left intellectuals from Poland, Germany, Sweden, Britain, Spain, Switzerland, France, and Italy. The talks and papers dealt with immigration, regionalism, television's impact on politics, and the moral and political problems of military intervention. Some of the papers will appear as *Dissent* articles (also in various European magazines) over the next months. (Joël Roman's "Letter from Paris," in this issue, is also the fruit of the Locarno meetings.) We welcome the new British journal *Soundings*, edited by Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey, and Michael Rustin, out this fall. Rustin, who has written often for *Dissent*, joined the Locarno group this year. "Generating new agendas for the left will be the main political task of *Soundings*," its opening statement declared, and that is also the "task" of the conference. Its meetings are made possible by the formidable administrative and fundraising skills of Antonio Spadafora, director of the Biblioteca.

—M.W.

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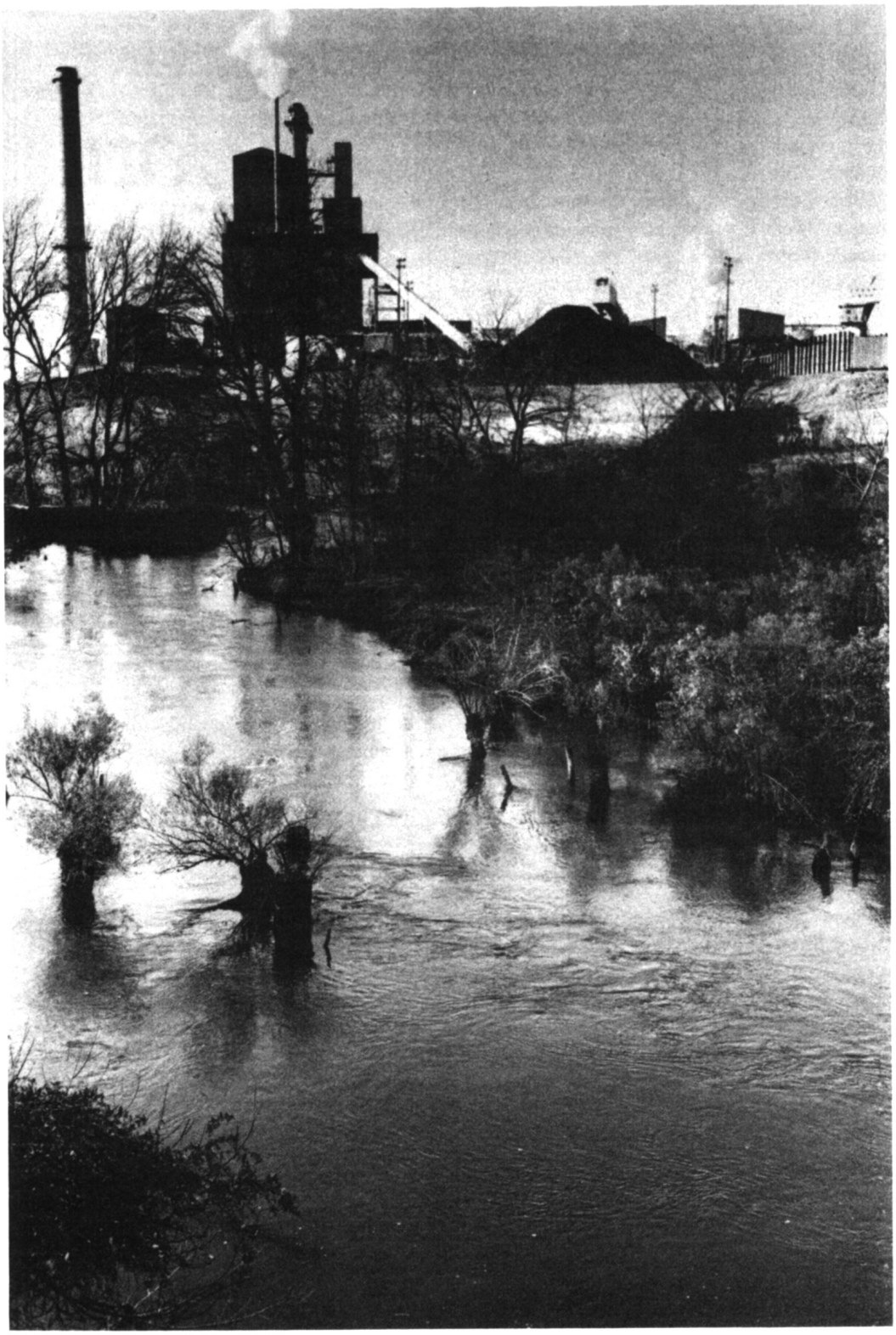

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Yaakov Garb

RACHEL CARSON'S *SILENT SPRING*

Scattered reports of problems with pesticides had appeared in the technical literature from the fifties onwards, but it was only in 1962 that a wide-ranging critique of pesticides was published for a popular audience. Brought out by a major trade press, this book charted the tremendous increase in the production and use of these chemicals since World War II, and documented their failings. Focusing on chlorinated hydrocarbons and DDT in particular, it described their physiological effects, their impact on human health and wildlife, and the inadequacy of existing pesticide regulation. The book demonstrated how pesticides were not only harmful, but ultimately self-defeating, since pests soon developed resistance while beneficial insects and animals that helped keep them in check were killed. Further pesticide applications to counter a resurgence of the targeted species and infestations of new insects that weren't a problem before began an escalating cycle. The book proposed replacing this hubristic attempt to master nature, which was destroying the earth's capacity to support human life, with a philosophy of wise management of ecosystems and the development of ecologically sound biological control of pests. These changes, the author stressed, should not jeopardize nutrition and the American economy, and pesticides should not be banned, only used very selectively.

The book flopped. It received short negative reviews in the literary supplements of the *New York Times* and the *Times* of London, and not much else, and soon disappeared. I doubt many of you have heard of its author, Lewis Herber, or remember its title, *Our Synthetic Environment*. A few months later, however, in three June issues of the *New Yorker* magazine and then in the fall as a book, Rachel Carson's critique of pesticides was published. Her *Silent Spring* contained in amplified form every one of the charges against pesticides I have just listed for Herber's work, but no substantially new ones. Yet Carson's critique created an immediate storm of media and governmental attention. There was much praise, as well as angry rebuttal and attacks, including a fierce and well-funded campaign by the chemical industry to counter Carson's message. Within a year of its publication, *Silent Spring* had prompted programs for scientific research into the hazards of pesticides, brought significant changes in their regulation, spurred public debate on environmental practices more generally, inspired a younger generation of environmental activists, and made ecology a household word. Carson's initially embattled viewpoint on pesticide problems rapidly became absorbed into public sentiment. It is standard in the historiography of environmentalism to speak of the book as a—perhaps the—watershed of the modern environmental movement.

Why did these two works have such a different fate? What enabled *Silent Spring*'s critique of pesticides to become so broadly accepted in middle-class America? Part of the answer lies, no doubt, in luck and in the *New Yorker* forum.

This is an abbreviated version of an essay to appear in David Macauley, ed., *Ecological Thinkers* (working title), Guilford, 1995. I am grateful to Iain Boal, Leo Marx, Peter Taylor, Charles Weiner, Rosalind Williams, Anna Tsing, Debra Keates, Barbara Goldoftas, Linda Lear, Danny Faber, and participants in the 1994-1995 IAS Social Sciences Seminar for comments on versions of that essay, and to the Institute for Advanced Study, where it was completed.

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Also contributing to the book's success were Carson's standing and skills as a gifted writer and her biological training, which Herber lacked. She was able to offer a terrifyingly eloquent portrait of what it would mean to inhabit an increasingly toxic landscape. Building on postwar anxieties about technological excess and radioactivity, Carson's novel descriptions of our vulnerability to new chemicals that acted in eerie and unexpected ways were shocking and galvanizing.

In this essay, however, I want to consider how *Silent Spring*'s success depended on its politics and, relatedly, its conception of nature. By not grappling head on with the political and economic factors that led to the entrenchment of pesticides in postwar America, and by centering its arguments instead on conceptions of natural balance and the web of life, the book was made palatable to a wide audience. I want to explore the mixed results of this success. The book's broad acceptance gave it considerable if circuitous political-economic impact. At the same time, its avoidance of politics troubled the logic of Carson's argument.

Herber's unnoticed book can scarcely serve as a model for a more politically desirable intervention, but it does highlight another conception of politics and nature that was possible, if not broadly acceptable, in that moment. Written pseudonymously by the journalist and anarchist theorist Murray Bookchin, who later became well known as the founder of social ecology, *Our Synthetic Environment* briskly covered almost all of the substance of Carson's critique of pesticides in less than twenty pages. The rest of the book documented the many other ways in which human health was compromised by the industrialized, urbanized way of life that increasingly characterized postwar America. Chemical hazards to human food supplies other than pesticides (synthetic hormones, antibiotics, and additives) were described in detail, as was the degradation and erosion of soil by large-scale agriculture, and the deterioration of the nutritional quality of crops raised on synthetic fertilizers. And beyond these problems of the food system, Bookchin described how health was endangered by a polluted, stressful, and dehumanizing urban environment; by the radioactive byproducts of nuclear testing and energy production; and by the rise in heart disease and cancer associated with lifestyle and environmental causes.

This range of assaults to human well-being and nature, claimed Bookchin, were of a piece, and originated in unviable social arrangements. They demanded a return to rural and agricultural communities of human scale through deindustrialization, decentralization, and a reining in of the profit motive, so that the "most pernicious laws of the market place" were not "given precedence over the most compelling laws of biology." Individual action or even remedial legislation were not, in his mind, sufficient to get at the heart of these problems; a sound ecological practice was synonymous, for Bookchin, with shaping a satisfying social life. Bookchin's pill was clearly too big, bitter, and unfamiliar for most Americans to swallow at that time. His book was dismissed as "nice sentiments, only impossible," as "numbing" or "unmanageable" in its scope, and as offering only "incoherent," "intangible," or hopelessly utopian proposals.[1]

Carson's Nature

Whereas the focus of Bookchin's analysis was "the relationship between human and human," *Silent Spring*'s center of gravity lay in Carson's reworking of deeply conventional conceptions of the balance of nature and the web of life. When the president of the chemical manufacturing company Monsanto characterized her as "a fanatic defender of the cult of the balance of nature," he was reacting to what is indeed the book's central metaphor. Carson's nature—a "complex, precise, and highly integrated system" characterized by relations of "interdependence and mutual benefit," and regulating checks and balances—was the new science of ecology's rendition of a conception that goes back to antiquity. In its explicitly theological eighteenth-century form, for example, the harmony and order underlying nature's economy had a divine source: God's providence ensured a system of perpetual balance among all living things, in which each creature had its allotted place. The "balance of nature" provided Carson with a norm against which human interference could be assessed and challenged. The existing "system of

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relationships between living things," she claimed, "cannot be safely ignored any more than the law of gravity can be defied with impunity." A second guiding metaphor in the book is the related notion of an "ecological web of life" whose "threads" "bind" together organisms and their environment so that even minute changes in one area reverberate over space and time.

These notions—the balance of nature, the ecological web, "the natural"—do a tremendous amount of persuasive work. Nature whole is the basis for *Silent Spring*'s unsettling tidings of balance lost. It allowed Carson to invert a tradition of nature writing that celebrated harmony and connectedness to cast pesticides as unnatural and sinister. Thus the book is dense with images of dislocation: a living world "shattered," landscapes "bludgeoned," threads "broken," fabric "ripped apart," delicate processes "uncoupled." Carson brought a tone of elegy into conventions of wonder by introducing her reader to the unseen dynamics and relations of the natural world (a hidden sea of groundwater, invisible bird flyways and fish migration paths, teeming microscopic soil life) through portraying their disruption by pesticides. And by including the delicate internal realms of human and animal physiology within nature's balanced and interconnected system, she seamlessly and chillingly joined inner and outer landscapes, ecology and human health, launching a new phase of environmental concern.

But although it provided Carson with a versatile conceptual framework and familiar stirring images, there are difficulties in founding a treatment of environmental destruction on a depoliticized notion of "nature." Terms like the "natural," or the "balance of nature" can obscure the social relations and priorities that go into evaluating environmental practices. Take, for example, Carson's preference for biological rather than chemical methods of pest control as less disturbing of "nature's balance." This term reifies judgments about the respective benefits and costs—to humans—of these methods, creating internal contradictions in Carson's account. Why, for instance, is the importation of an exotic pathogen (a bacteria) to kill the Japanese beetle a "natural" means of control? Is this intervention—which Carson notes in passing kills not only the target species but at least forty other species in the scarabaeid family—more respectful of the balance of nature than certain pesticides?

Similar questions could be asked about each of the biological control technologies Carson celebrates: juvenile hormones, chemical attractants, repellent sounds, microbial and viral infection of insects, introduced predators and parasites. For example, she enthusiastically endorses the dispersal of X-ray-sterilized male screwworms and heralds the "complete extinction of the screw-worm in the Southeast" as a "brilliant success" and "a triumphant demonstration of the worth of scientific creativity." Slipping into the militaristic imagery she objects to in the proponents of pesticide spraying, she talks approvingly of research that turns "insect sterilization into a weapon that would wipe out a major insect enemy." But surely the difference between this celebrated method and the chemical practices Carson castigates lies not in their inherent degrees of "naturalness" but in (human) judgments about their respective impacts. Had Carson chosen to cast the X-ray sterilization of males as unnatural, the rhetorical resources she uses to disparage pesticides could easily have been redirected, as in the following imagined rendition of the same facts Carson gives in her celebratory account.

> Rather than seeking to understand the intricate life cycle and ecology of this tiny insect, scientists invented a scheme that would allow them, by infiltrating the very heart of their natural reproductive cycle, to sever the link between generations. Day after day, in huge "fly factories," technicians bombarded male insects with mutagenic radiation and then, using 20 light planes working 5 to 6 hours daily, these insidious carriers of genetically altered material were dispersed over huge areas. Unsuspecting females mated with these seemingly normal products of the laboratory. While these unions produced eggs, these were, without exception, sterile. In less than two years, the species had vanished.

The ease with which a creative triumph becomes a tragedy of technological hubris highlights the instability of the categories of natural and unnatural.

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Bookchin's analysis in *Our Synthetic Environment*, which didn't rest on notions of "the balance of nature," is spared these particular paradoxes. As part of nature, humans are justified, claims Bookchin, in making the world's fate up as they go—if they do so with an eye first and foremost toward "promoting human health and fitness." There is, he argues, no preordained state that must be preserved forever, and the "quasi-mystical" and unreserved valorization of "nature" and the "natural" is misguided, "an impediment to a rational outlook." For him human emotions in the presence of nature are not an indication of nature's special metaphysical status (as they were for the Transcendentalists with whom Carson sympathized), and reticence in using technology to remake nature in service of our needs should not be sentimentalized. "Our nostalgia," he claims, "springs from a growing need to restore the normal, balanced, and manageable rhythms of *human* life—that is, an environment that meets *our* requirements as individuals and biological beings" (emphasis mine). (Note that having forgone biological nature as a guide for human action, Bookchin immediately recovers another nature: the "normal" and "balanced" rhythms of human life.)

Politics, and Its Avoidance

The massive adoption of synthetic pesticides in the postwar decades in America was facilitated by a densely interrelated network of factors. The dynamics of the competitive free market pressured farmers, suppliers of farm technology, and food processors toward pesticide use. In addition, pesticides were first tested and mass produced during a period when priorities were skewed by wartime agendas; they were institutionally and culturally entrenched at the war's end. Existing standards and legal procedures were not fitted to enforce the regulation and testing of this new technology, nor to establish liability for damages it caused. And a pest-control method that was chemical-based, fast-acting, broad-spectrum, and seemed to offer total eradication accorded well with certain American cultural values. In the face of these forces, the underfunded and mismanaged biological control methods that had shown great promise in the decades prior to the war did not stand a chance, and were soon eclipsed.

Silent Spring, however, made visible only a tiny part of this network of factors. This is because Carson cast the entrenchment of pesticides and the call for their replacement as primarily an epistemic and moral problem, rather than a political-economic one. This, I believe, is a large part of what allowed her work to be so broadly accepted.

The book's muted political stance was in part a consequence of its author's background. Carson came to her book as a biologist, as an author immersed in the nature writing tradition since adolescence, and as a former writer and editor of public information publications for the Fish and Wildlife Service. (Bookchin was steeped in the writings of the Frankfurt School, in anarchist theory, and Marxism.) But an avoidance of overt politics was also a strategic choice, one of several Carson made in carefully shaping a defensible challenge of pesticide practices. Linda Lear in her forthcoming biography of Carson shows, for example, how Carson chose to include only a small amount of the extensive evidence she had for the environmental origins of cancer, and declined to mention organic gardening for fear of being associated with food faddists. Nor did Carson invoke the biocentric convictions about the inherent worth of other forms of life that she expressed in other writing. Similarly, while it is clear from her remarks in interviews and from her collaboration with the politically outspoken director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Biological Survey, Clarence Cottam, that Carson was keenly aware of the financial incentives that skewed the development, use, and evaluation of pesticides, she kept this out of the book.

Carson had been warned of the hostility her pesticide work would invoke. She wrote in a period that some have called the "McCarthy era of the environmental movement," in which those who questioned the use of pesticides were specifically branded as being against the spirit of free enterprise. After the appearance of the *New Yorker* articles, for example, Louis A. McLean, secretary and general counsel of Velsicol, the sole manufacturer of chlordane and heptachlor, sent a five-page registered letter to Houghton

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Mifflin suggesting that it might want to reconsider publishing *Silent Spring*. His letter built up to the following statement:

> Unfortunately, in addition to the sincere opinions by natural food faddists, Audubon groups and others, members of the chemical industry in this country and in Western Europe must deal with sinister influences whose attacks on the chemical industry have a dual purpose: (1) to create the false impression that all business is grasping and immoral, and (2) to reduce the use of agricultural chemicals in this country and in the countries of Western Europe, so that our supply of food will be reduced to east-curtain parity. Many innocent groups are financed and led into attacks on the chemical industry by these sinister parties.[2]

In such a climate even some members of the Sierra Club's board of directors opposed the appearance of a positive review of *Silent Spring* in the Club Bulletin. A more forthrightly "political" analysis would probably not have survived to have *Silent Spring*'s political impact. At the same time, however, Carson's avoidance of politics left unchallenged the structural underpinnings of pesticide use that are with us still.

One concrete way in which politics was avoided in her text was through the circumlocutions she substituted for the names of chemicals, their manufacturers, or other delinquent parties in order to avoid lawsuits. With the exception of the Army Chemical Corps, Carson did not name a single manufacturer of chemicals or pesticide brand name. For example, her extended description of the biological havoc caused by pesticide wastes dumped over the course of ten years by "a chemical plant" doesn't say which. Her discussion of a new carcinogenic chemical used against mites and ticks requires a stream of nonspecific designations: "a chemical," "this chemical," "the chemical," "the product," "the suspected carcinogen," and so on, rather than Aramite, the product's name. Even when protesting the fact that certain innocuously named weed killers sold for suburban lawns didn't list their ingredients, including chlordane and dieldrin, nor mention their dangers, she withheld the names of these products at this tantalizingly apt point, when mentioning them would have worked directly to end their facade of benignity. But even in the absence of potential legal action, claims Linda Lear, Carson might not have mentioned specific names; contention about specific culprits, Carson felt, would have distracted from her central message.

On a larger scale, Carson downplayed the political implications of her account through a consistently elliptical capping of its descriptions of irrational pesticide use. Repeatedly she argued that the instances of spraying she describes were not only harmful to humans and wildlife, but unjustified even in terms of biological effectiveness or economic payoff to farmers. Why did spraying take place nonetheless? Carson's scenarios demand an answer, but hers is vague or often lacking altogether. Readers are left to make their own inferences or, more likely, to ignore the troubling questions these narrative lapses signal. This kind of hanging question is most comfortably accommodated at the end of sections. "The science of range-management," she says in the last sentence of chapter six, "has largely ignored [the] possibility [of biological control of weeds by plant-eating insects] although these insects . . . could easily be turned to man's advantage." She concludes another section with the observation that "there is no dearth of men who understand these things . . . but they are not the men who order the wholesale drenching of the landscape with chemicals." Elsewhere she describes how "funds for chemical control came in never-ending streams, while the biologists . . . who attempted to measure the damage to wildlife had to operate on a financial shoestring." Why the marginalization of effective biological control? the distance between those who know and those who order? the discrepancy between budgets for inventing chemicals and for studying their damage? Carson's silence on these questions buries the problem of the democratic control of science, technology, and production.

To the extent that Carson does trace the origins of the destruction whose "irrationality" she has exposed, her account of agency is feeble and diffuse, her blame mild. Destruction of the environment stems from people's failure to "read" the "open book" of the landscape; facts about pesticides' destructiveness are denied out of "shortsightedness;" spraying continues because of "entrenched custom," or "surely, only because the facts are not known."[3] "We are walk-

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ing in nature like an elephant in the china cabinet," she quotes a scientist whose "rare understanding" she respects, implying "our" problem to be one of clumsiness.

Even at the level of single sentences Carson frequently masks agency and blame through passive or negative sentence constructions. She tells, for example, of farmers who chose to spray crows rather than switch to a variety of corn that didn't attract birds because they "*had been persuaded* of the merits of killing by poison" (emphasis mine). Her excision of the subject here closes down a crucial line of inquiry. A similar negative formulation lessens blame even as it assigns it. "Because the spray planes were paid by the gallon rather than by the acre," Carson says, "there was no effort to be conservative." How much more powerful would this sentence have been had its latter part been directly and positively phrased: "there was incentive to use as much as possible"? (It would also have helped had she unreified "spray planes" to make more visible which *people* were paid.)

Carson's reticence about the political and economic forces encouraging heedless pesticide use made it hard for her to talk about fundamental social interventions as part of a solution. Her proposals, therefore, gravitate toward the only resource left to her: a respect for the balance of nature and ecological interconnectedness, to be achieved through attitudinal reform and the technologies of biological control. Her call for new attitudes is a reasonable, even inspiring, repudiation of human arrogance in favor of an attitude of cautious "guidance," reasonable "accommodation," sensitive "management," and an ethic of "sharing" rather than "brute force." These are valuable orientations in themselves, but their mildness and abstraction bespeak the book's missing politics.

Carson offers the biological control of pests as the technical manifestation of this more humble attitude. One could not hope for a more symbolically-appealing solution: Yankee ingenuity in service of a pastoral ideal. By pastoral here I am referring to what Leo Marx points to as the most long-lived Western model for an appropriate relation to nature, which proposes a middle ground between the wild and the overcivilized. *Silent Spring* opens with such a middle ground in its rustic idyll of "a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings." This prosperous town is far from the trouble of cities, but also safely removed from wild nature, signified by the barking of foxes in the distant hills. Pesticides are an evil blight disrupting this harmony, killing the town's birds and animals and bringing a strange stillness, a silent spring. At the end of the book, in the last chapter, entitled "The Other Road," Carson offers her proposal for regaining this lost balance through various forms of biological pest control. It too is structured as a middle ground, a way of navigating between the technological hubris of pesticides on the one hand, and a vulnerability to nature's wildness in the form of pests on the other. It embodies the pastoral vision of enjoying the best of human artifice and inventiveness while preserving a closeness to natural cycles and creatures.

Yet Carson had evidence suggesting that humility and artifice alone often did not determine the choice of pest control methods. She herself describes the repeated bypassing of forms of biological control *known* to be cheap, effective, and harmless in favor of harmful chemicals. And she knew that for decades prior to World War Two, before they were eclipsed by faster acting and profit-producing insecticides, biological methods had been investigated and adopted not because they offered a more "natural" or ethically superior solution but because they were cheap and effective. Nor were the many problems that plagued chemical pesticides (resistance, resurgence, toxicity, bioaccumulation) a surprise that surfaced with their widespread agricultural use in the postwar years; most were recognized decades before *Silent Spring* was published.

Carson mentions some of these early successes as well as several contemporary "shining models" of nonchemical methods of pest control in her chapter on biological control. And in her next chapter, on the problems of chemical control, she describes prominent early disasters and the intensification of pesticide side effects in the late fifties. Once again, she has juxtaposed facts that pose a pointed question: why has a problematic form of pest control replaced an ef-

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fective one? Here she offers the book's sole explicitly structural analysis, consisting of the two paragraphs about chemical industry funding for university research mentioned earlier, whose impact is soon diluted with more idealist explanations. The chapter continues to talk of people being "slow to recognize" problems with pesticides, and of chemical research drawing the best people because it seems "more exciting," and Carson concludes it with a quotation that exemplifies the book's dominant message.

> We need a more high-minded orientation and a deeper insight, which I miss in many researchers. Life is a miracle beyond our comprehensions, and we should reverence it. . . .The resort to weapons such as insecticides to control it is a proof of insufficient knowledge. . . .Humbleness is in order; there is no excuse for scientific conceit here (243).

Bookchin makes a different use of the past in his somewhat broader and more forthright account of how vested interests have shaped the directions taken by modern agriculture. He discusses, for example, how the food industry undermined enlightened standards for food purity in place at the beginning of the century, and nibbled away at the Delany clause protecting consumers from carcinogens. For Bookchin, these early achievements are not simply models for what could be achieved again in the future; his description of the eclipse of sane ways of doing things points his readers to the political struggle necessary to establish and uphold these.

Pushing the Limits

Silent Spring presented facts that brought its readers to the threshold of difficult questions about how pest control might be guided by biological knowledge and democratically determined priorities, rather than the logic of capital accumulation. But Carson's avoidance of politics, abetted by her conceptions of nature, helped lead them away again. Through these she taught her readers to see pesticide problems as resulting from oversight and carelessness, or at the most arrogance, rather than from greed or systemic structural factors. By casting the problem of pest control as primarily an issue of achieving a harmonious relationship to "nature," with little reference to the social criteria embedded in the term, nor the changes in social institutions necessary to achieve this harmony, Carson stripped her book of overtly political analysis or claims. She seemed to believe that it was enough to present the facts and let public opinion take over.

My goal, however, is not to judge the book politically ineffective or undesirable, only to highlight the limits of what could be said and widely heard in that particular moment. The disappearance of Bookchin's work and the furor over even the politically restrained *Silent Spring* suggest that Carson stood close to these limits. A broadly understandable and persuasive challenge to the pesticide paradigm had both to criticize and placate, to extend and maintain existing worldviews. Carson's book did not call for nor achieve a fundamental democratization of research, technology, and production. But it did frighten people, link health to nature for the first time as a topic of heated public debate, and draw on familiar conceptions of nature to undermine the postwar aura of pesticides as a marvelous technical achievement and cast them as sinister and stupid instead.

The book's political consequences are complex, and still unfolding. It prompted a debate that led to legislation banning some pesticides and tightening the procedures for testing, registering, and using others. But with political-economic ground rules remaining intact, agriculture and the chemical industry could respond to these developments relatively easily. Restrictions placed several years later on organochlorines, the earliest generation of synthetic pesticides such as DDT, for example, didn't halt their continued manufacture for export, nor the development and profitable production of other pesticides, nor recent attempts to genetically engineer profitable and hazardous pest and pesticide resistant crops. More generally, these reforms did nothing to stop the trend toward increasingly mechanized and large-scale agriculture that made pesticides unavoidable. On the thirtieth anniversary of *Silent Spring*'s publication the executive director of the National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides could still describe America as standing at the crossroads between "promoting safer alternative pest management techniques or simply substituting less toxic inputs into conventional pesticide-intensive practices."[4]

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At the same time, however, other longer term and more subtle effects of the sea-change Carson helped initiate are only now beginning to surface. For example, the cost of approving a new pesticide and the demand for "organic" produce have both grown to a point where alternative forms of pest management are now becoming economically feasible. Curiously, it may have required an "apolitical" challenge to pesticides to initiate this process. □

Notes

[1] Quotations are from a review by John Osmundsen in the *New York Times Book Review*, May 19, 1963, p.28; and from a review in the (London) *Times Literary Supplement*, February 15, 1963, p.103.

[2] Frank Graham, Jr., *Since Silent Spring* (Houghton Mifflin, 1970), p. 49.

[3] Could this "surely" be Carson allowing herself a touch of irony?

[4] Jay Feldman, "Thirty Years after *Silent Spring*, the Choice Is Clear," *Global Pesticide Campaigner* 2(4) (1992), pp. 11-12.

In Memoriam
GEORGE ECKSTEIN

We mourn the death of our friend and comrade, former *Dissent* editor George Eckstein. George's long political and intellectual career was marked by a steady fidelity to the most generous ideals of democratic socialism. A leader of a socialist youth party in Germany, George was arrested by the Nazis in 1933. On his release, though he remained under police surveillance, he managed to escape to Paris, where he became active in left-wing anti-Stalinist political circles. In 1939 he moved to New York, becoming associated with Dwight Macdonald's iconoclastic magazine *Politics*, and, later, with *Dissent*. Until the 1980s, when ill health forced him to retire from the editorial board, George wrote regularly for *Dissent*, on topics as diverse as West German politics, black theater in the United States, European film, and the New Left. His writings about the youth movements of the 1960s and 1970s, in both West Germany and the United States, were marked by a complex point of view: he was wary of the fanaticism of some of the young militants and dryly critical of what he called "Pop Politics" ("You can't always be sure where a movie ends and a demonstration begins," he wrote in 1968), but he sympathized deeply with the intensity of the New Left's response to social injustice. In a review of the memoirs of Czeslaw Milosz—another exile from totalitarianism who remained a critic of capitalism's inequities—Eckstein spoke of Milosz's "tragic knowledge and somber hope." The phrase captures the spirit of Eckstein's own writing. Despite the horrors he witnessed in his youth, he remained a lifelong member—sober, ironic, articulate—of the party of hope.

—THE EDITORS

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George Scialabba

LIVING BY IDEAS

AGAINST THE GRAIN: *THE NEW CRITERION* ON ART AND INTELLECT AT THE END OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, Hilton Kramer and Roger Kimball, eds. Ivan R. Dee, 463 pp. $35, cloth; $16.95, paper.

"Lord, enlighten thou our enemies,' should be the prayer of every true reformer," wrote Mill in his essay on Coleridge. "Sharpen their wits, give acuteness to their perceptions, and consecutiveness and clearness to their reasoning powers. We are in danger from their folly, not from their wisdom: their weakness is what fills us with apprehension, not their strength." Over the last three decades, those of us who share these sentiments have had our prayers answered in the shape of the *Public Interest*, the *National Interest, Commentary,* and the *New Criterion.* True, neoconservatism may have sometimes seemed to consist mainly of superficially plausible arguments for profoundly pernicious policies—a blessing we would perhaps rather do without. But for such ingratitude Mill had an answer:

> Even if a Conservative philosophy were an absurdity, it is well calculated to drive out a hundred absurdities worse than itself. Let no one think that it is nothing to accustom people to give a reason for their opinion, be the opinion ever so untenable, the reason ever so insufficient. A person accustomed to submit his fundamental tenets to the test of reason will be more open to the dictates of reason on every other point. Not from him shall we have to apprehend the owl-like dread of light, the drudge-like aversion to change, which were the characteristics of the old unreasoning race of bigots.

And anyway, not all their opinions are untenable. In its crusade against the politicization of contemporary culture, the *New Criterion* is—on the whole, in the main, and not to put too fine a point on it—right. Notwithstanding the importance of legal and social equality for women, homosexuals, and members of racial minorities, most of the cultural strategies employed in the service of these ends have been—again, on the whole, and with many exceptions, not always duly acknowledged by conservative critics—misguided and counterproductive. Multiculturalist pedagogy; the promotion of "cultural diversity" through arts administration, philanthropy, and public policy; academic departments of Women's Studies and Afro-American Studies; the project of "critical theory"; and in general, the greatly increased weight—in teaching and research, hiring and funding, programming and grant-making—given to explicitly political considerations: altogether these things have done more harm than good. They have undoubtedly made possible some valuable work and attracted some people to culture who would otherwise have been lost to it. But they have also generated a really staggering amount of mediocre and tendentious work. And not only do these ideological priorities make for less accomplished artists and scholars; they also make for less effective citizens. Gratuitously politicizing one's professional or artistic activity can distract from—can even serve to rationalize the avoidance of—everyday democratic activity, with all its tedium and frustration. As Richard Rorty has pointed out in these pages: "One of the contributions of the newer [that is, the radical-academic] left has been to enable professors, whose mild guilt about the comfort and security of their own lives once led them into extra-academic political activity, to say, 'Sorry, I gave at the office.'"*

*Richard Rorty, "Intellectuals in Politics" (*Dissent,* Spring 1992).

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This, at any rate, is my interpretation of (admittedly a very small sample of) the vast literature on the contemporary culture wars. It is a view formed in not insignificant measure by reading the *New Criterion*. Along with books and essays by Richard Bernstein, Russell Jacoby, Christopher Lasch, Diane Ravitch, Robert Hughes, David Lehman, Frederick Crews, Harold Bloom, Helen Vendler, Camille Paglia, Irving Howe, Katha Pollitt, Harold Fromm, Robert Brustein, and others, the magazine's steady documentation of absurdity and outrage, its chronicling of intellectual sins both grave and venial, has worn down and finally worn away my initial sympathy with the cultural program of my political comrades. Of course, excruciating firsthand experience with the writings of Edward Said, Houston Baker, bell hooks, Donna Haraway, and other leading cultural radicals has also done its part.

Against the Grain, forty-five selections from the *New Criterion*'s first thirteen years, is a less polemical volume than one might expect—that is, it is less than wholly polemical. Much of it is simply very good critical writing: John Simon on Nabokov, Joseph Epstein on Cavafy, Guy Davenport on Gertrude Stein, Brooke Allen on Shaw, Brad Leithauser on Housman, John Gross on Beerbohm, Samuel Lipman on Walter Gieseking, James Tuttleton on Frederick Douglass. In one of the book's more programmatic pieces, Hilton Kramer calls for a return to connoisseurship—that is, "the close, comparative study of art objects [and literary texts] with a view to determining their relative levels of aesthetic quality." It is a cogent formulation, which the above-mentioned essays and others in *Against the Grain* well exemplify.

The more contentious selections are less consistently satisfying. Plenty of points are scored, but the point is sometimes missed. According to Roger Kimball, for example, Foucault was nothing more than a con man. Certainly he was a con man, but nothing more? A short chapter in Michael Walzer's *The Company of Critics* carefully, dispassionately analyzes Foucault's theory of politics, past its occasionally brilliant insights down to its fundamental incoherence. The result is no less devastating and vastly more illuminating than Kimball's skillful hatchet job. Similarly, Gerald Graff's debatable suggestion that radicals and conservatives argue out their differences before their students becomes, in James Tuttleton's account, a devious stratagem preparing the way for academic totalitarianism. The golden rule of polemics is: state your antagonist's view as persuasively as possible. This rule is frequently broken in *Against the Grain* (as well as in every issue of the *New Criterion*). Still, some pieces in this vein are undeniably fine, like Kramer's fierce, gloomy, eloquent, and heartfelt vindication of traditional high culture as the proper content of undergraduate education, and a characteristically witty and penetrating address by Christopher Ricks, "What Is at Stake in the 'Battle of the Books'?"

There is an essay by Immanuel Kant (not found in *Against the Grain*) entitled "On the Old Saw: That May Be True in Theory, But It Doesn't Hold in Practice." Contrariwise, I find the *New Criterion* generally right in practice—in its judgments about "relative levels of aesthetic quality" and intellectual merit—but mistaken on what it identifies as the crucial theoretical issue in the culture wars: that is, relativism. The politicization of culture, Kramer and Kimball write, "rests on the contention that nothing is meaningful or valuable *in itself*: that everything, from literary texts and paintings to personal relations, must be understood as an interchangeable token for the exercise or expression of power." They cite as the purest statement of this execrable doctrine a sentence by Stanley Fish: "There is no such thing as intrinsic merit." This, they thunder, is "a version of nihilism and a license for sophistry."

> For if there is no such thing as intrinsic merit, then no judgment of quality can be anything more than a veiled political commendation or a statement of personal partisanship. Without the idea of intrinsic moral, intellectual, and artistic value, criticism and scholarship degenerates into a species of propaganda, and morality becomes little more than a cynical calculus aimed at increasing personal advantage. *The New Criterion* takes categorical exception to such beliefs. We proceed on the conviction that there *is* such a thing as intrinsic merit, that it can be discerned and rationally argued for, and that its rejection is a prescription for moral and cultural catastrophe.

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Well, then, what is intrinsic merit? "Intrinsic" can't mean "universally agreed upon," since no aesthetic criteria are. It can't mean "independent of inherited, unconscious, or other local determination," since no beliefs are. It can't, in short, mean supra-historical and noncontingent, since nothing whatever is. What Fish, Rorty, and other pragmatists contend is that all criteria start out equal and must be justified to those who would be affected by their adoption—that democracy, in other words, is prior to philosophy. Beyond this, as Fish never tires of pointing out, antifoundationalism has no consequences. In any case, if Kramer and Kimball believe there are objective, irrefragable, rationally demonstrable aesthetic and moral criteria, they ought by now to have offered the rest of us a fairly precise idea of what they are, or in whose writings they can be found.

They haven't, and they can't. But then, they needn't. They need only muddle along, employing and occasionally articulating the criteria that have emerged from our culture's conversation since the Greeks initiated it, and showing that what used to and still usually does underwrite our judgments about beauty and truth is inconsistent with giving Robert Mapplethorpe a one-man show, or Karen Finley a National Endowment for the Arts grant, or Toni Morrison a Nobel Prize. More than that, no one can do.

The patron saint of the *New Criterion* is Matthew Arnold; and rightly, for no one has written better about the proper relation between culture and politics. Arnold's notions of "disinterestedness" and "the free play of mind" are an excellent corrective for contemporary left-wing cultural practice. All values may be political in an ultimate, metaphysical (or rather, anti-metaphysical) sense. But that—as Fish would be the first to acknowledge—is a null, an empty sense. In the ordinary, everyday, practical sense, there are indeed nonmoral and nonpolitical values. The hunger for beauty, for perfection of form, is as organic as the hunger for justice. To subordinate one to the other, or ignore one for the sake of the other, is, as Kramer and Kimball warn, a prescription for universal mediocrity.

Quite possibly, however, if the shade of Matthew Arnold returned to preside over the contemporary debate, he would have a word or two to say to his disciples at the *New Criterion* as well. For one thing, Arnold's polemical manners were impeccable, while Kramer's and Kimball's are atrocious. He never wrote a rancorous word, and they never wrote a gracious one. "Sourness and light" is their critical formula, *toujours attaquer* their polemical maxim. "We have discovered," they assert, "that a more delicate phraseology is not so much conciliatory as feckless: an invitation to discount the seriousness of the issue." One can imagine Arnold's (or, for that matter, Trilling's) astonishment and disgust at this pronouncement.

For another thing, the *New Criterion*ists sometimes boast that they and not the multiculturalists are the true democrats, applying to themselves Arnold's words in *Culture and Anarchy*: "The men of culture are the true apostles of equality. [They] are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of the society to the other, the best ideas of their time." But it is a hollow boast. Arnold freely acknowledged, as Kramer and Kimball do not, the dependence of spiritual equality on at least a rough, approximate material equality. Here are a few more words from *Culture and Anarchy:*

> Culture, or the study of perfection, leads us to conceive of no perfection as being real which is not a *general* perfection, embracing all our fellow-men with whom we have to do. . . . Individual perfection is impossible so long as the rest of mankind are not perfected along with us. . . . So all our fellow-men, in the East of London [cf. the South Bronx] and elsewhere, we must take along with us in the progress towards perfection, if we ourselves really, as we profess, want to be perfect; and we must not let the worship of any fetish, any machinery, such as manufactures or population [cf. "economic growth" or "national security"]—which are not, like perfection, absolute goods in themselves, though we think them so—create for us such a multitude of miserable, sunken, and ignorant human beings, that to carry them all along with us is impossible, and perforce they must for the most part be left by us in their degradation and wretchedness. But evidently the conception of free-trade [cf. "freedom from government interference"], on which our Liberal [cf. Republican] friends vaunt themselves,

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and in which they think they have found the secret of national prosperity—evidently, I say, the mere unfettered pursuit of production of wealth, and the mere mechanical multiplying, for this end, of manufactures and population threatens to create for us, if it has not created already, those vast, miserable masses of sunken people [cf. the "underclass"]—one pauper, at the present moment, for every nineteen of us—to the existence of which we are, as we have seen, absolutely forbidden to reconcile ourselves, in spite of all that the philosophy of *The Times* [cf. the *Wall Street Journal*] . . . may say to persuade us.

In *Culture and Anarchy*; in "Democracy," where he argued against the antigovernment party that "the action of a diligent, an impartial, and a national government ... can really do much, by institution and regulation, to better the condition of the middle and lower classes"; and in "Equality," with its affirmation that "Certainly equality will never of itself alone give us a perfect civilization. But with such inequality as ours, a perfect civilization is impossible"—in these and other passages Arnold demonstrated his humane moral imagination and democratic good faith. Kramer and Kimball have yet to demonstrate theirs.

Finally, there is the complicated matter of disinterestedness, or intellectual conscience. That both Kramer and Kimball would sooner die than fake a fact or twist a quote, I do not doubt. But disinterestedness is something larger, finer, rarer than that. To perceive as readily and pursue as energetically the difficulties of one's own position as those of one's opponents; to take pains to discover, and present fully, the genuine problems that one's opponent is, however futilely, addressing— this is disinterestedness as Arnold understood it.

Arnold thought he had found a splendid example of it in Burke who, at the close of his last attack on the French Revolution, nevertheless conceded some doubts about the wisdom of opposing to the bitter end the new spirit of the age. In "The Function of Criticism" Arnold cited this passage and commented:

> That return of Burke upon himself has always seemed to me one of the finest things in English literature, or indeed in any literature. That is what I call living by ideas: when one side of a question has long had your earnest support, when all your feelings are engaged, when you hear all round you no language but one, when your party talks this language like a steam-engine and can imagine no other—still to be able to think, still to be irresistibly carried, if so it be, by the current of thought to the opposite side of the question, and, like Balaam, to be unable to speak anything "but what the Lord has put in your mouth." I know nothing more striking, and I must add that I know nothing more un-English.

I wish I could imagine someday praising Kramer and Kimball in such terms. But alas, I know nothing more un-*New Criterion*-ish. □

Stanley Hoffmann

AFTER LONG SILENCE

IN RETROSPECT, by Robert S. McNamara (with Brian Van de Mark). New York, Random House/Times Books, 414 pp. $27.50.

Robert McNamara's "insider account of Vietnam policy-making," as the book jacket calls it, raises three issues. One is the way in which vital decisions were made, the reasons why the men who made them were "wrong, terribly wrong," and the lessons we should draw from these catastrophic errors. The second is why a tormented, earnest secretary of defense did not resign in protest against a policy whose dreadful effects he had gradually comprehended. The third is why it took him so long to unburden his conscience and to tell the story. The public storm that followed the publication of the book was caused almost exclusively by the second and third questions—one of which (the last) he never addresses in print, and one of which he discusses in less than a page. These are two very important issues, to which I will return. But it is the first that is the subject of this memoir, and even those who have taken McNamara to task for his stand on resignation and his long silence ought to recognize that, however late, he has performed a very great service to his country in writing this devastating, candid, and searching report.

Of course, it has its limits. On the one hand, McNamara's cult of objectivity—which used to take the form of a fondness for mathematical

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certainties and quantitative indices whose shortcomings he now recognizes—his reluctance to splash his feelings on the pages (a kind of *pudeur* that conceals, I think, a genuine fund of emotions and feelings) may put off some readers who expected something more personal. (I, for one, will not blame him for this.) On the other hand, much of what he tells us had been revealed by the Pentagon papers, whose collection he ordered before leaving his post, and most of his conclusions had already been reached by the man whom he had put in charge of the Pentagon papers, Leslie Gelb, in a famous article that he later turned into a book with the help of Anthony Lake.

Nevertheless, McNamara's contribution is enormous. Not everyone has the time or the need to go through the seven thousand pages that Daniel Ellsberg, in 1971, leaked to the *New York Times*. And reading a compact version of this story told by one of the chief architects of the policy is a very different experience. Most memoirs are self-serving: they either celebrate the author's feats or they are apologies for his mistakes. McNamara's are an unrelenting exercise at pointing out the magnitude of the mistakes, their disastrous effects, their cumulative weight. To repeat what he says, even in summary form, is really not necessary for readers of *Dissent*. Those who, thirty or twenty-five years ago, opposed the war (and especially those critics who did not believe that America's policy-makers were moved by evil intentions, who thought that they were, so to speak, objectively rather than subjectively evil, and who did not see the Vietnamese Communists as shining knights, however heroic their fight for national unity) will find the book a documented confirmation of their sharpest accusations. South Vietnam could not put together a stable and legitimate government capable of mobilizing energies for its defense; the very weakness of the country forced the United States to take over its fate to such an extent that it behaved like a colonizer and thus undermined the very cause—self-determination—that it was supposed to uphold. Moreover, the way in which the war was fought made no sense: the bombings of the North, as McNamara rapidly discovered, did very little to reduce Hanoi's capacity to wage war and hardened its determination. The search-and-destroy strategy in the South, made possible by the huge deployments requested by the military, and then used to justify incessant demands for more troops—a strategy that McNamara accepted far too long—ravaged the very country we were supposed to "save." McNamara thought that this enormous expeditionary corps would at least incite Hanoi to negotiate. Not only did this not work, but he shows how messed up—largely by Lyndon Johnson's reluctance to suspend bombings of the North and by continuing failure to think through the concessions a genuine negotiation would have required—all the attempts at a diplomatic solution were.

McNamara is particularly good at showing another often incredible messiness: that of what is pompously called the decision-making process. He compares the concentrated and intense deliberations of the Kennedy administration during the Cuban missile crisis with the lack of anything comparable throughout the long years of the Vietnam war during which he was a key player. Unchallenged assumptions; un-thought-through proposals; incremental escalations that invariably led to more, and more ineffective, additions; unresolved conflicts among the decision makers; frequent shifts in position among the principals (including George Ball, the main dissenter); a constant tendency to avoid a rigorous evaluation of the costs and benefits of alternative policies; and, in Johnson's case, a determination to keep from the public the reality (and the financial costs) of a major war; a refusal to level with Congress and the people (so as to protect his domestic priorities); and a tendency to make decisions secretively after brushing aside questioning and deviating arguments (such as those presented by McNamara in two agonizing memos in 1967)—this was the "process" set up by the "best and the brightest."

The eleven lessons that McNamara draws at the end are only too sound—and relevant to the present and the future: especially precepts No. 4—"our misjudgments of friend and foe alike reflected our profound ignorance of the history, culture and politics of the people in the area, and personality and habits of their leaders," No. 5—

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about misplaced faith in technology, and No. 10—"we failed to recognize that in international affairs, as in other aspects of life, there may be problems for which there are no immediate solutions." These lessons provide the essence of what could be called the tragic, gradual education of McNamara and, indeed, of many Americans, insofar as the young business leader who became Secretary of Defense in 1961 displayed so many typical American strengths and flaws. My one criticism would be that he should, in some part of the book, have done a more systematic job of putting together not just the lessons of Vietnam but the assumptions, often implicit, that pushed the political and military leaders into a bloody quagmire: the laughable conviction that Vietnam was a quasi-puppet of "Peiping" and that what was at stake was the containment of Red China's strategy of national liberation wars; the belief that the loss of South Vietnam would have catastrophic effects not only in the area (the famous domino theory) but all over the world (as if America's credibility was better served by a demonstration of brutal ineptitude); the arrogant "can-doism" displayed by practically all the elites, from ex-President Eisenhower to the so-called wise men whose advice was so frequently lamentable. It is precisely because McNamara tries so hard to be fair (especially to LBJ) that his book is so devastating: nobody comes out well—and he makes no effort to spare himself. We must give him credit for this: it is a rare event.

We can, however, not give him credit for having stayed as long as he did, and for moving (or being moved) to the World Bank in early 1968 without a public word of protest against the war, or of warning about its future. His brief defense, on page 314—that to challenge the policy "would have been a violation of my responsibility to the President and my oath to uphold the Constitution"—is wrong, terribly wrong. The ultimate responsibility of a public official is to his or her country—and indeed, when one's country's behavior is criminal, to humanity. It is hard to believe that a principled and, so to speak, didactic resignation would not have shaken the policy and the assumptions on which it was based. On this point, the education of McNamara remains incomplete. Many years ago, James Thompson, a former aide of McGeorge Bundy, wrote in the *Atlantic* a brilliant article about the failure of so many American officials to resign on matters of principle, and to explain why. The article remains as compelling now as it was then.

This leaves us with the last issue: why did it take McNamara so long to write this book? In talk shows and debates across the country, he has given—again—unconvincing excuses: to have written this earlier would have brought "aid and comfort to the enemy." Let us admit this, as the French would say—however, this argument expired in 1975, when Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese. Moreover, what gave aid and comfort to the enemy was an American policy that played into Hanoi's hands and was incapable of "saving" the South. A critique of the war by one

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of its architects would have been far more useful to the American people than helpful to Ho chi Minh. My own guess it that the real reason is far less political and far more psychological: that for may years this troubled and contradictory man, so eager for certainty, and always, at any moment, so sure of himself, could simply not bring himself to put all of this on paper. His change of mind on nuclear weapons—from the decision to build a thousand land-based missiles in 1961 to his later crusade about the military futility of these weapons, summarized in an appendix here—was something he could communicate reasonably early, since after 1945 nuclear weapons had never been used, and it made, in his view, essential sense to plead against any temptation to expand and use these arsenals in the future (indeed one of the most horrifying stories in this book is that of the many suggestions made, often in veiled words, by the military, and even McGeorge Bundy, to threaten to use nuclear weapons against Hanoi). But McNamara's change of mind and of heart about Vietnam was much harder to cope with: more than fifteen thousand Americans and hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese were killed while he was in power, and it must have been sheer agony for this proud and constricted man to put his pain on paper. Rather than berating him for his limitations and delays, I would congratulate him on having overcome his inhibitions and written a convincing, lucid, and deeply honest book.

David W. Orr

ECO-DENIAL

A MOMENT ON THE EARTH, by Gregg Easterbrook. Viking, 1995. 745 pp. $27.95.

Gregg Easterbrook begins his 745-page opus with a summary of what he calls "ecorealism," which is essentially the view that the war to preserve a habitable earth is all but won or will be by the year 2000, and that those who won it ought now to be upbeat and happy. Alas, they are not. Six hundred and ninety-eight pages later he zooms back from outer space, having greened Mars, trashed all manner of what he deems to be insufficiently optimistic thinking, and created what he calls a "new nature" on earth, one without predation, aging, violence, species extinctions, or killer asteroids. In the long view Easterbrook envisions an overall "human population of hundreds of billions or even trillions of souls" living throughout the cosmos, and "Earth as a planet-size preserve; or a world where a small human contingent uses advanced knowledge to live the nonmaterialist lifestyle of ecological longing." Easterbrook advertises himself as an "ecorealist."

Aside from a Niagara Falls of words and details, two big things happen between the description of ecorealism and the human takeover of the cosmos. First, there are some hundred and fifty-seven pages of what the author calls the "long view," in which such things as climate change and soil erosion are portrayed as minor events. Shifting continents, glaciation, and collision with asteroids have wreaked far greater havoc than degradation caused by humans. "Nature," he says, "has for millions of centuries been generating worse problems than any created by people." I do not for a moment doubt the truth of this assertion. Nor do I doubt that from, say, Alpha Centauri, four light years away, a nuclear war on earth would scarcely make the mid-day farm report. Easterbrook enjoins us to place our ecological woes into the perspective of geologic time, and from a sufficient distance they do indeed look like a quibble. The earth is a "fortress," he says, capable of withstanding all manner of insult and technological assault. Somehow I take little comfort.

Second, having informed the reader that in the cosmic scheme of things our ecological problems are not really that bad, he attempts to prove that they really do not exist in the short-term either. The reader is whipsawed back and forth between real success stories, denial, selective use of evidence, outright error, and caveats with which Easterbrook hedges all of his bets. There are really two Easterbrooks, one carefully selecting evidence to advance a view that the war for a habitable earth has been won, the other following quickly behind with a caveat to say that it may not be so. Early on, for example, he of-

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fers a "running caveat" that "Humanity may be executing many subtle forms of damage to the biosphere, damage that . . . is not yet apparent from our shortlived perspective." He then proceeds to ridicule all of those, including Rachel Carson, who have ever taken this view seriously.

Similarly, after downplaying the prospect of global warming, he quickly says that "any artificial global warming may not transpire in a gradual fashion, giving warning of itself and many decades to react." Later, in a single paragraph he is capable of wondering, "why take chances with something as important as the climate conditions necessary for agriculture," but then telling us, "When people act in ways that put extra carbon dioxide into the air, all they do is confront nature with a bit more of a substance that would have been in the air man or no." Huh? Thirty-nine pages later he states:

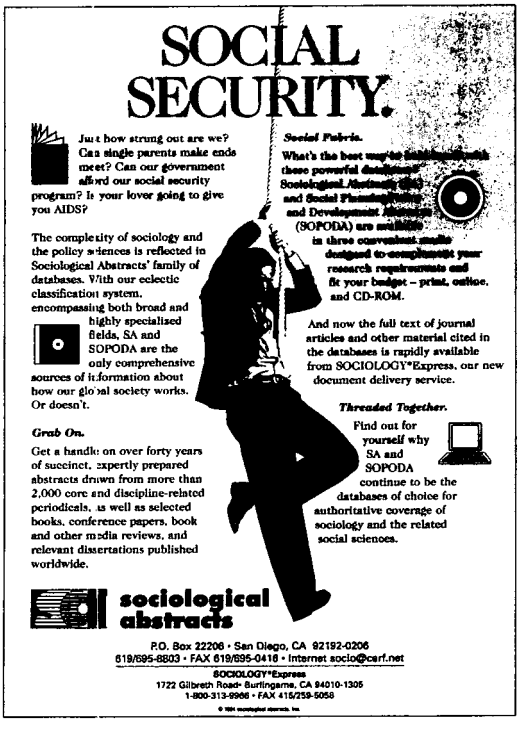
> By tampering with the climate, people play with exactly that aspect of nature experience suggests most likely to do them in. Even if the odds of an artificially triggered climate emergency are low, prevention is amply justified.

Later, he asserts that "mild warming is probably in society's interest" but fifteen pages after that he states, "Any reasonable policy that reduces the odds of climate change is more than worth the price."

Are toxic chemicals a problem? No, but "Public fear of chemicals is an entirely rational reaction." Is acid rain a problem? Well, "no," but this "does not rule out alarm." Genetic engineering? Not a problem, but "A disaster cannot be ruled out." Overpopulation? A short-term "disaster," but "over the long term. . . a boon for the natural scheme." And so it goes.

Easterbrook's book is not built on science, it is built on resentment. He applauds the "extraordinary success of modern environmental protection . . . perhaps the best instance of government-led social progress in our age." But he does not like the tens of thousands of people who brought it about. These he snidely dismisses as "enviros" and attributes all manner of bad faith to them. They "pine for bad news." They suffer from a "primal urge to decree a crisis" and "subconscious motives to be alone with nature." Pessimism, for them, is "stylish." He does have kind things to say about former Environmental Protection Agency director William Reilly, who in turn says exceedingly flattering things about the book on its jacket. Mostly, Easterbrook likes those whose focus is purely technological and dislikes those who raise larger and messier questions about ethics, justice, and politics.

Ah, yes, politics. In the fall of 1994, about the same time that Gregg Easterbrook, who writes for *Newsweek*, would have been working over the galley pages for *A Moment*, hired guns for the Republican party were drafting the final version of *The Contract With America*, one part of which aimed to dismantle all of the environmental protections so painstakingly erected over the past twenty-five years. Easterbrook and his happy book were blindsided by reality. From the rubble of collapsed illusions, he wrote in the *New York Times* on April 21 that "until the new Congress began, all signs seemed encouraging." Where has Easterbrook been for the past twenty-five years? Were ominous signs not apparent in virtually every legislative and regulatory battle? Now, he plaintively wonders whether "all the apparent progress in the chemical industry [has] been merely a public-relations ploy," and whether he was duped by the logging industry, which "recently embraced a bill that would make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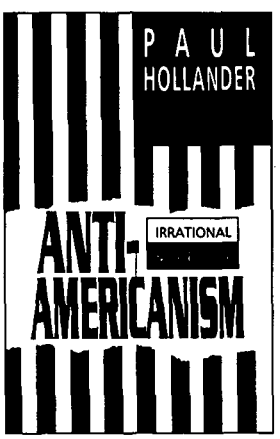
a mockery of the Endangered Species Act." He had been, as it were, taken in. This explains a great deal about his book: statements like "current ecological law is. . . far stronger than in the 1970s," his dismissal of the possibility of any disaster with genetically engineered substances because "regulation is strict," and his assertion that American firms operating in Mexico "will bring with them U.S.-standard ecological controls." Easterbrook's "ecorealism" rests on a foundation of political naivete.

Few environmentalists have ever doubted that we have the know-how to lessen human damage to the environment. The problem has always been whether we had the political and moral will to do so. But Easterbrook's *Moment* has virtually nothing to say about human arrogance, greed, stupidity, and evil—all of the things that keep people and whole societies from doing what they can do and what they ought to do. Nor does it have anything but scorn for recent attempts to recalibrate our ethics and religious beliefs to include care for the natural world. Easterbrook, who describes himself as a liberal Presbyterian, cavalierly dismisses these as "Earthianity." In doing so, he cuts the ground from below any effective environmental movement. The "enviros" for whom he has such scorn, the very people who brought about the "extraordinary success of modern environmental protection," are more often than not motivated by some larger vision of reality than Easterbrook wishes to acknowledge. The global movement to preserve a habitable and beautiful earth is not just about self-interest, it is about transcending self-interest in order to be faithful to larger duties and obligations. For many "enviros" it is about the sense of wonder before the mystery of creation itself. For people so motivated, the principle of precaution forbids economic and technological carelessness. Easterbrook likes the result—environmental protection—but does not like the combination of moral outrage and plain good sense that have so far made it happen.

Easterbrook's *Moment* is already out of date, but its influence will, unfortunately, linger for a long time. Yes, there have been notable environmental successes, but mostly on the things that were relatively easy to do. Even these gains are under assault. The hard tasks and the difficult choices are still to come. When we do finally confront them we will discover that they are as much political and moral as scientific and technological. That being so, it's foolish to hold the victory party quite so soon. □

This review appeared in slightly different form in the August 1995 issue of *Natural History* magazine, © the American Museum of Natural History.



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Proving Orwell Right

Editors:

Richard Wolin's interesting review of my book *World Orders, Old and New* (*Dissent*, Summer 1995) arrived, fortuitously, just after an interview with a Greek journalist who opened with a standard question: why do I stress so insistently that the United States is so free and democratic? A few days later, the *Times Higher Education Supplement* quoted my description of the United States as "the most free and democratic society in the world." And so on, throughout the world.

Looking at the same material, Wolin fumes that my "familiar stump speech" is "fifty reasons why we live in a totalitarian society," a thesis that he magisterially refutes by "point[ing] out the obvious": that the CIA doesn't cart me off to the Gulag. He even indicates his source, while omitting my one relevant sentence: free societies are "quite different" from those that use force, relying rather on means for "shaping" opinion to give "a certain perception of the world" (M. Achbar and P. Wintonick, *Manufacturing Consent*, p. 134, film script).

The point that Wolin labors not to understand is clear, unambiguous, and obvious to all but the most dedicated ideologue; even to him, sometimes, in his comment about "soft" and "hard" totalitarianism, which, though muddled, suffices for self-refutation. In the book under review, the brief discussion opens with Hume's maxim that government is founded on control of opinion, from the "most despotic" to "the most free and most popular"—where "state controls are rarely exercised directly," my comment adds. The text then turns to Orwell's observation in his introduction to *Animal Farm* that "the sinister fact about literary censorship in England is that it is largely voluntary. Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without any need for any official ban," yielding outcomes not unlike those of the totalitarian sate he satirizes. I then quote Dewey making a similar point, along with others who emphasize that the "new technique of control" by "manufacture of consent" is of particular importance in democracies where "the public must be put in its place" as "spectators," not "participants" (Harold Lasswell, Walter Lippmann, and others). There is now extensive documentation substantiating Orwell's charge with regard to "the most free and most popular" society—what Wolin derides as an "Orwellian vision" of the free societies, in an interesting choice of phrase.

To show that the thesis means its negation, and that in "nonmetaphorical description of the United States my only hesitancy is whether it is "totalitarian" or "fascist," Wolin quotes the conclusions drawn (accurately) from several illustrations of Orwell's observation. By Wolin's reasoning, Orwell condemned free societies as totalitarian.

Note that he quotes only the *conclusions* about "voluntary" treachery that so horrify him, scrupulously avoiding the evidence on which they rely. Another useful device.

The details maintain the standard. To take just one: Wolin asks with a sneer how the analysis of the media that Edward Herman and I presented could deal with a "genuinely dissident opinion" by Walter Cronkite in 1968. To find out, he has only to turn to the book to which he refers, which discusses this very case as a clear example of "voluntary" subordination to doctrinal orthodoxy,as indeed it is (*Manufacturing Consent*, p. 322).

So it proceeds, useful perhaps as an illustration of Orwell's observation, hardly otherwise.

NOAM CHOMSKY
Cambridge, Mass.

Richard Wolin Replies:

As should be evident from my review and other writings, I would be the last to deny that democratic societies have a vested interest in shaping public opinion. Chomsky chooses to emphasize the monolithic nature of opinion formation in these societies, which accounts for his frequent use of such adjectives as "fascist," "totalitarian," and so on to describe their impregnability. What is more interesting to me is the ways in which they *fail* in this endeavor. Despite the considerable political and cultural means at the disposal of opinion makers and politicians, most citizens remain, contra Chomsky, surprisingly capable of penetrating the veils of deceit and making up their own minds. Although processes of opinion formation may well initially transpire within well-circumscribed boundaries, such orchestration is no guarantee of the way in which the majority of men and women will choose to interpret the data and arrive at independent decisions. Historically, we have seen countless instances of this phenomenon at work: from the antiwar protest movements of the 1960s to Watergate and Iran-contra. More recently, an incumbent Republican president was voted out of office less than two years after his so-called job-approval rating had crested at around 85 percent. All of which suggests that Chomsky's Orwellian metaphors are seriously misplaced. In fact, the descriptive use of such metaphors is conducive to furthering the levels of social atomism and passivity that the very opinion makers Chomsky derides seek to foster. After all, if the powers that be are as impregnable and monolithic as Chomsky suggests, what else is there for us to do but sit back and adapt?

Finally, I leave it to Chomsky's own conscience and intellect to reconcile his freely admitted use of Orwellian concepts with the remark of the occasional journalist to

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the effect that the MIT linguist views the United States as "the most free and democratic society in the world." □

On Hiroshima

Editors:

This is to comment on some aspects of "50 Years After Hiroshima" (*Dissent*, Summer 1995). Jean Bethke Elshtain essentially argues that "Hiroshima and Nagasaki must inevitably become reinserted in the warp and woof of history, not viewed as symbols hovering above the bloody ground that was World War II...." It is not a persuasive argument. No nuclear weapon has been unleashed during the half century since World War II despite numerous occasions. The reason has been Hiroshima—a symbol indeed, a dire warning of the bounds that military action must not transgress.

Hiroshima cannot be compared with the firestorms visited by Allied aircraft upon Tokyo, Hamburg, Dresden, even if it be true that loss of life turned out to be less. The use of one airplane dropping a comparatively simple device to destroy a city and its populace denoted an economy in the deployment of military resources and an efficiency of delivery that sundered the limits, the wide limits made possible by the full-scale industrialization of warfare. Elshtain writes that "stripped of their situatedness in time and place, terrible happenings become awfully abstract."

I was a soldier in the U.S. Army at the time of Hiroshima, and neither I nor those of my colleagues who reflected on the matter, nor my friends in the socialist movement (who never cease to reflect) were able to "situate" the nuclear destruction of the city amid the immense course World War II had taken. It was not assimilable. This held as true for Harry Truman and for many of his associates. Hiroshima sticks out in memory like another, equally inassimilable event: Auschwitz.

It is true, of course, that the Nazis deployed a mechanized death machine, driven by purposes of profound evil. And Auschwitz to this day burdens the conscience of the Germans immeasurably more than Hiroshima could ever burden ours. However, notwithstanding the effort of numberless scholars, Auschwitz will not be integrated in history—it will not be "situated." And, as noted, this remains true, if on a lesser scale of conceptual complexity, for Hiroshima.

Be it noted that it was not the atomic bomb but air attacks on cities and their noncombatant inhabitants that set new "standards" of warfare in World War II. The destruction of noncombatant populations and their habitats was unprecedented in scope and intensity. There could never be a rationale for it, moral or otherwise. (The Strategic Bombing Survey conducted shortly after the war found that air attacks had not significantly impeded the warmaking capacity of the enemy.) The air attacks were a desecration of the human heritage. Yes, the cities have been reconstructed, new generations of people live in them, memories fade. Yet, powerful reminders remain, none more so perhaps than Picasso's "Guernica," a wrathful protest but also a beseechment, futile as it turned out, but never to be forgotten.

H. Brand
Bethesda, Md.

Jean Bethke Elshtain Replies:

I appreciate H. Brand's comments, but I fear he misunderstood my argument. In fact, his letter constitutes an attempt to come to grips—historically—with Hiroshima. He notes that "it was not the atomic bomb but air attacks on cities and their noncombatant inhabitants that set new 'standards' of warfare in World War II." That was precisely my point. Rather than seeing the atomic bomb as severed from all other events, including the saturation bombing of cities that became more or less routine during World War II, we must analyze atomic weaponry as part of that history, not apart from it. That Hiroshima and Auschwitz have become horrific symbols is true. That this makes them somehow beyond analysis, or understanding, is not. □

No Justification Possible

Editors:

I was surprised and a little shocked to see Michael Walzer refer to the non-use of the atomic bomb since 1945 as a "justification," however "retrospective," for the bombing of Hiroshima (*Dissent*, Summer 1995). Of all the arguments adduced for the bombing this has always struck me as not merely the worst but as no argument at all. . . . One might just as well argue that the Holocaust was justified because most Jews living today are living amid less anti-Semitic prejudice and much more safely—as indeed they are—because of the abiding horror the Final Solution inspired in all decent people everywhere.

Walzer's short article in your summer issue represents to my way of thinking a radical lapse from his usual legal and moral reasoning, which I have always found to be informative and indeed exemplary.

Walzer seems by the way to be blissfully ignorant of the fact that the educational argument for the bombing was adduced not merely after the fact but during the crucial deliberations of the Interim Committee, which was set up to decide whether and how the atomic bomb should be used. And it was precisely the schoolmasters—James Conant of Harvard and Arthur Compton at the University of Chicago—who argued that the bomb would be used as a warning to mankind.

Intellectuals everywhere, beware; and beware of intellectuals!

William Sweet
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Michael Walzer Replies:

William Sweet's analogy between Hiroshima and the Holocaust is not a good one, since it seems radically unlikely that anyone else would have murdered six million Jews had Hitler and the Nazis not done so, and virtually certain that someone else would have used the bomb had we not done so. But I did not mean to accept this "justification" for Hiroshima; I began my piece by saying that the bombing was wrong. My point was rather that Americans who do accept it can find no moral comfort in it. □

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Forget the Honor

Editors:

My goodness! Two consecutive issues of *Dissent* in which I appear in an unfair and most unflattering light! I'm beginning to feel as if I've become an honorary member of the *Dissent* family. At least Oliver Conant's article on Teachers for a Democratic Culture (Spring 1995) was smart and original. But Sean Wilentz's little screed on black intellectuals is sorry fare for a forum of ideas—half potshot, half rehash, wholly inadequate to the task. I'm writing, then, in the hope that you'll allow me a brief reply to Mr. Wilentz.

First, as to matters of emphasis and tone. Wilentz writes: "Bérubé compares Cornel West's collection of popular essays, *Race Matters*, to Lionel Trilling's *The Liberal Imagination*, not because of their respective merits or arguments, but because of how many copies they sold, how influential they have purportedly been. Thus Bérubé informs us, with no trace of irony, that another black writer publishes her books 'in apparent accord with the Bruce Springsteen approach to product placement,' that she drives a BMW, and that she now holds the same title that Irving Howe once held at the City University of New York."

Well, all right. It should be obvious that if I were writing a monograph instead of a review essay, I might have been able to go into some detail about *The Liberal Imagination*; but my point was *precisely* that Trilling and West may be comparable in terms of sales and influence. This is not an unseemly point to make in a magazine article. More, I hope it would be obvious that in comparing bell hooks's books to Bruce Springsteen's albums, I was indeed being ironic. I can only hope that in his apparent outrage at my noting that a prominent black feminist now holds the same academic rank once held by the august Irving Howe Himself, Mr. Wilentz is also being ironic.

Second, there's the matter of giving credit where credit is due. Wilentz writes that there are "likenesses" between the New York intellectuals and contemporary black writers "which neither Bérubé nor [Robert] Boynton examine. The work of both the New Yorkers and the younger black writers, for example, has a tendency to interpret politics in cultural ways and culture in political ways, a tendency that has been limiting as well as illuminating." Truncated as it may be, this is the basis of the last two-thirds of my essay, where I take up (among other things) the cultural influence of Malcolm X, the ascendancy of the New Right, and the academic left's fixation on cultural politics and relative neglect of public policy.

What's interesting about Wilentz's anxiety of influence is that it accounts for the smugness and self-satisfaction that runs through Wilentz's piece. Deriding me as a mere "celebrity monger," Wilentz, like Adolph Reed before him, has managed to write an essay whose only intellectual "substance" lies in the charge that *other* writers on black intellectuals have lacked intellectual substance. There are indeed a few ideas in Wilentz's essay, to be sure, but sharp-eyed readers have already seen them treated in greater depth in the *New Yorker* and the *Atlantic*.

Third, allow me to address the charge of racism. Wilentz writes: "Even more invidious is the liberal racism that lurks within the celebrations—nothing as sinister as outright racism, but a distortion that grows from a fixation on race. . . . To discuss, say, the work of Thomas Sowell, as Bérubé does, with only a perfunctory reference to his links with his white conservative colleagues is fundamentally to distort the context of his work and theirs."

This borders on intellectual fraud. I devoted but two paragraphs of my essay to Sowell's *Race and Culture*, and I concentrated on Sowell's chapter on "Race and Intelligence." I wanted to show how Sowell rejects the Herrnstein/Murray "genetic" explanation of IQ differentials among races even as he endorses their conclusions in the realm of social policy. Because Sowell was drawing on intelligence research with which I am intimately familiar, I aimed to show how Sowell's data contradicted both Sowell's and Murray's proposals for dismantling what remains of the welfare state. Along the way I pointed to Sowell's links to non-black conservatives not once but twice. Accusing me of "liberal racism" in this regard is simply outrageous—and, as I say, downright fraudulent.

Last, I ask how Wilentz can pose as Cornel West's lone defender while he opportunistically castigates me for "celebrating" *Race Matters*. Wilentz writes: "Well outside the celebrity mongers' gaze, [West] has also tried to open up lines of reasonable conversation where practically none exists anymore, or where the lines have become frayed—between black churches and elite universities, the democratic left and the U.S. Senate, blacks and Jews. . . . In 1963, it was possible to open the *New Yorker* and find Dwight Macdonald there descanting thoughtfully and at length about *The Other America*. Now in place of Macdonald there is Michael Bérubé celebrating *Race Matters* and works by the other new black intellectuals—a case of misjudgment, no doubt, but also a sign about more general trends in intellectual reportage."

Early in his piece, Mr. Wilentz spills way too much ink fretting over how my article "turned up in" and "managed to slip into" the *New Yorker*. No mystery there: like all review essays, it was *assigned*—in this case, assigned to someone more knowledgeable than fellow *New Yorker* contributor Sean Wilentz. But as long as we're policing the territory, what would Macdonald have to say about a descant as shoddy as Wilentz's, I wonder? First Wilentz cribs my line on West and company, that "black public intellectuals are doing their work—at colleges, in churches and on cable TV—at a time when the very idea of 'the public' has become nearly unthinkable in rational politics." Then he declines to discuss my critique of *Race Matters'* treatment of the black underclass, just as he declines to discuss the proposition on the table, namely, the question of how (as I put it in the same paragraph) things like public housing, public education, public health, public ownership, and public welfare can be re-legitimated by so-called public intellectuals on the left. Then he calls my essay a "case of misjudgment," even though he's just argued that Cornel West merits the kind of treatment I've given him.

Listen. Like a lot of left-liberal people looking for

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illumination in dark times, I count on *Dissent* for intelligent, incisive commentary on culture and politics. I know you can do better than Wilentz's work—the rest of your Summer issue is testimony to that. I'll tell you what. If you publish an essay that takes up the question with which I ended *my* essay—namely, the role of the "public intellectual" at a time when the idea of "the public" is itself under siege—then I'll stop wondering how Sean Wilentz's piece managed to slip into your pages. Is it a deal?

MICHAEL BÉRUBÉ
Urbana, Ill.

Sean Wilentz Replies:

Michael Bérubé misquotes me. I charge him and other writers not with "racism" but with "racialism." The distinction is important, as I explained in my original comment. Otherwise, readers can judge for themselves the merits of his allegations and insults. I do hope—sincerely, not ironically—that Professor Bérubé will cease being merely an honorary member of the family by sending *Dissent* his best writing, and for pages other than this one. □

Skewed Worldview

Editors:

In "Will the Twenty-first Century Be the Pacific Century?" (Spring 1995), Daniel Bell claims that culture can be looked at in two different dimensions, and he defines the second or artistic dimension as "the 'expressive' products in the arts and literature and styles of a society that display its 'creative' contributions." Bell has a picture, which is similar to W. E. B. Du Bois's in his essay "The Conservation of Races," that nations appear upon the stage of world history with their unique contributions to world civilization. Bell says,"Historically, as nations have emerged upon the world scene, this has been accompanied by an upsurge in creativity. This has usually been called the realm of 'high culture,' and Japan provides a bright illustration of it." When I read these words, I thought Bell was using the words "a nation's creativity" in the way we usually do, that is, "having created *unique* products in the arts and literature having an impact on *the nation itself* or/ and the rest of the world (including, of course, the West)."

However, when Bell goes on to use the example of Japan to illustrate his point, "creativity" turns out to mean simply "having an impact on the West." He says, "In the post-World War II period, Japanese culture made a dramatic impact on the West, as great perhaps as the period a hundred years ago when *Japonisme*, particularly the Ukiyo-e prints, had a major impact on the style of Degas, Whistler, Vuillard, and other Western artists. . . . But much of this has been dimmed. . . ." Bell, thus, might have concluded that there has been notably little impact on Western culture. However, his conclusion is that "there has been notably little impact on world culture by other Asian countries, with the small exception of some of the newer films from China." So, for Bell to get his conclusion, he has to presuppose that Western culture is world culture and world culture is Western culture.

With these presuppositions, Bell can hardly give an adequate answer to the question, "Will the twenty-first century be the Pacific century?" In fact, there are two questions. As far as economics and development are concerned, one may ask, "Will the Pacific countries alone create the most industrial products that will have a dramatic impact on the West?" This is a meaningful, empirical, and answerable question. However, artistic products cannot and should not be looked at as industrial products, although works of mass culture have become a sort of industrial product. Thus, as far as what Bell calls the second dimension of culture (or what he calls "high culture") is concerned, it seems to me that the question becomes, "Will the Pacific countries alone create unique artistic products of high culture in the twenty-first century?" I wonder whether this is a good question to ask.

YANG XIAO
Elmhurst, N.Y.

Daniel Bell Replies:

Mr. Yang misreads me and conflates three different issues: (1) almost every nation or civilization has had periods of efflorescence of creativity: the Renaissance in Italy, Al-Andalus in Spain, the Heian period in Japan, and so on; (2) the question of why such efflorescence occurred at the time it did: such as the replacement of Paris by New York in painting after World War II; and (3) the way that certain national cultures or enclaved cultures became taken up and influenced other modes and styles, such as my illustration of *Japonisme* on Western painting and printmaking at the turn of the century.

For a large portion of the last two millennia, most of international culture has been Western culture—in part because other societies were enclosed. Culture when it is creative is also syncretistic, as with Picasso's absorption of African forms in his painting and sculpture. The brunt of the question I asked is whether the Asian nations, now becoming strong industrially, will also become more creative in the arts. I did not presume a *causal* relation between the two, but in the past, wealth and patronage have been conditions of cultural creativity (if only, at times, to attract artists from other countries to the centers of wealth). As it is, I think that in Japan, the country I know best, the "great" period of novels (Tanizaki, Kawabata, and others) flourished before the period of its economic peak. But then, American writing has also diminished in the past two decades. (More protest?) □

Corrections

There were some copyediting errors in Jeffrey Scheuer's piece "The Television Thing" (*Dissent*, Summer 1995), which we regret and wish to correct. On page 300, in the right column, top paragraph, "more-or-less complex view" should be "a more or a less complex vision"; later in the paragraph, the phrase "multiple spheres and layers" should be "multiple spheres and layers of causality"; and in the last sentence on that page, "the imminent powers of video, hypertext, and interactive CD-ROM" should read "the imminent powers of video, computer games, and online services."

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The Last Page

A quiet revolution took hold in New York City during the humid summer months. WNYC FM and AM, the public radio stations owned by the city since 1922, were put on the selling block by a Republican mayor set on privatizing city assets. Rudy Giuliani, who is governing by slashing city services—yet still dares to fancy himself a "liberal"—capitulated to radio listeners in Manhattan's elite neighborhoods by agreeing to sell the radio stations at a bargain basement price of $20 million, a below-market value.

WNYC's loyal listeners—there are seven hundred thousand of them according to the radio station's numbers—value WNYC's intelligent talk shows on the AM outlet, the National Public Radio news shows and a host of cranky, informed classical radio announcers who still maintain their sixties edge while playing some of the most sophisticated classical music selections in the nation on the FM band. I, for one, willingly gave the requested $25 pledge to the station's "independence" campaign.

At first glance, it looked as if the mayor bucked the sentiment of the Republicans in Congress who seek to destroy public radio when he "saved" WNYC by selling it to the not-for-profit WNYC Foundation. Perhaps, finally, progressives had a victory—we didn't lose the FM frequency to a heavy metal station with three-minute news cycles or the AM to another kind of talk radio.

Yet, look again. The attack nationally on public radio is an attack on governmental funding of the airwaves. *We don't care what you liberals listen to,* say the new batch of Republicans in charge of divvying up the federal revenues. *Just don't make us pay for your habits.* Rush Limbaugh, they remind us, is a *real man who doesn't need federal funding—he can earn his way on the open market.*

It is likely that the dumping of WNYC onto the shoulders of its listeners was met with applause by committees in Congress who are currently figuring out ways to unload the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and National Public Radio. After all, WNYC, with its mix of listener donations, corporate gifts, and minimal government support, is the perfect American hybrid. Now, losing all its city financing, it becomes the model child of the nineties, left to fend for itself.

This orphaning of public radio is another example of a frontier Republicanism that outdoes most other conservative movements. For example, the Republicans' Tory cousins in England—even after decades of rule—still support the BBC through targeted tax revenues. The BBC license fee, payable on every television in the country, is even increased periodically for inflation. Although the Tories complain about Labor bias in the BBC, they haven't halted the tax collection, nor has the public rebelled against the tax. (The Tories instigated all sorts of union problems, but that's another story.) In Canada, too, the CBC outlasted the federal Tories.

It should be apparent that there's a need for a nationwide radio network in the United States. But that argument is difficult to make to Republicans who no longer allow for the most minimal telecommunications regulation. Government funding of radio news and quality programming is a good thing; democratic socialists should support it just as we support public financing of schools and transportation.

But what a dilemma! We must lobby to save public radio from the congressional cuts. Simultaneously, we have to respond to the marathon requests proffered by public radio personalities for listener contributions, even though our enthusiastic response strengthens the hand of those same Republicans who want to cut loose public radio! Yet how else, in this present climate, will we save treasured institutions like WNYC?

—Jo-Ann Mort □

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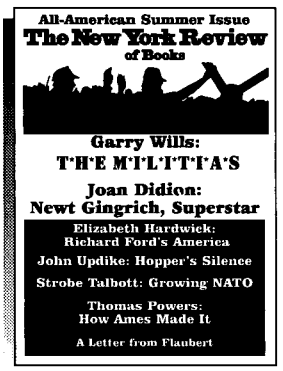

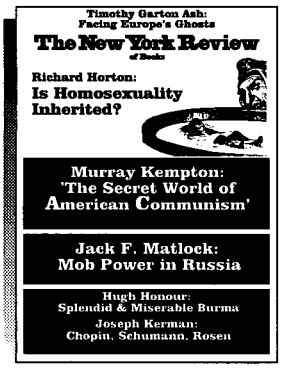

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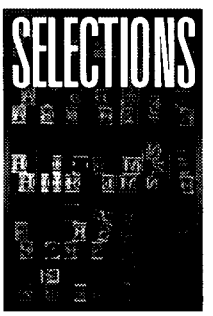

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